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The Flying Yankee; OR, THE OCEAN OUTCAST.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN IN IRONS.

ONE pleasant autumn afternoon, in the year 18—, an armed vessel was majestically sailing toward the land, and heading for a haven within the rock-bound harbor of Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Before a steady four-knot breeze, and with all her canvas spread to greet the welcome wind that filled her sails, the ocean warrior glided on, ever and anon changing her course in a manner that indicated that her helmsman had a perfect knowledge of the circuitous channel.

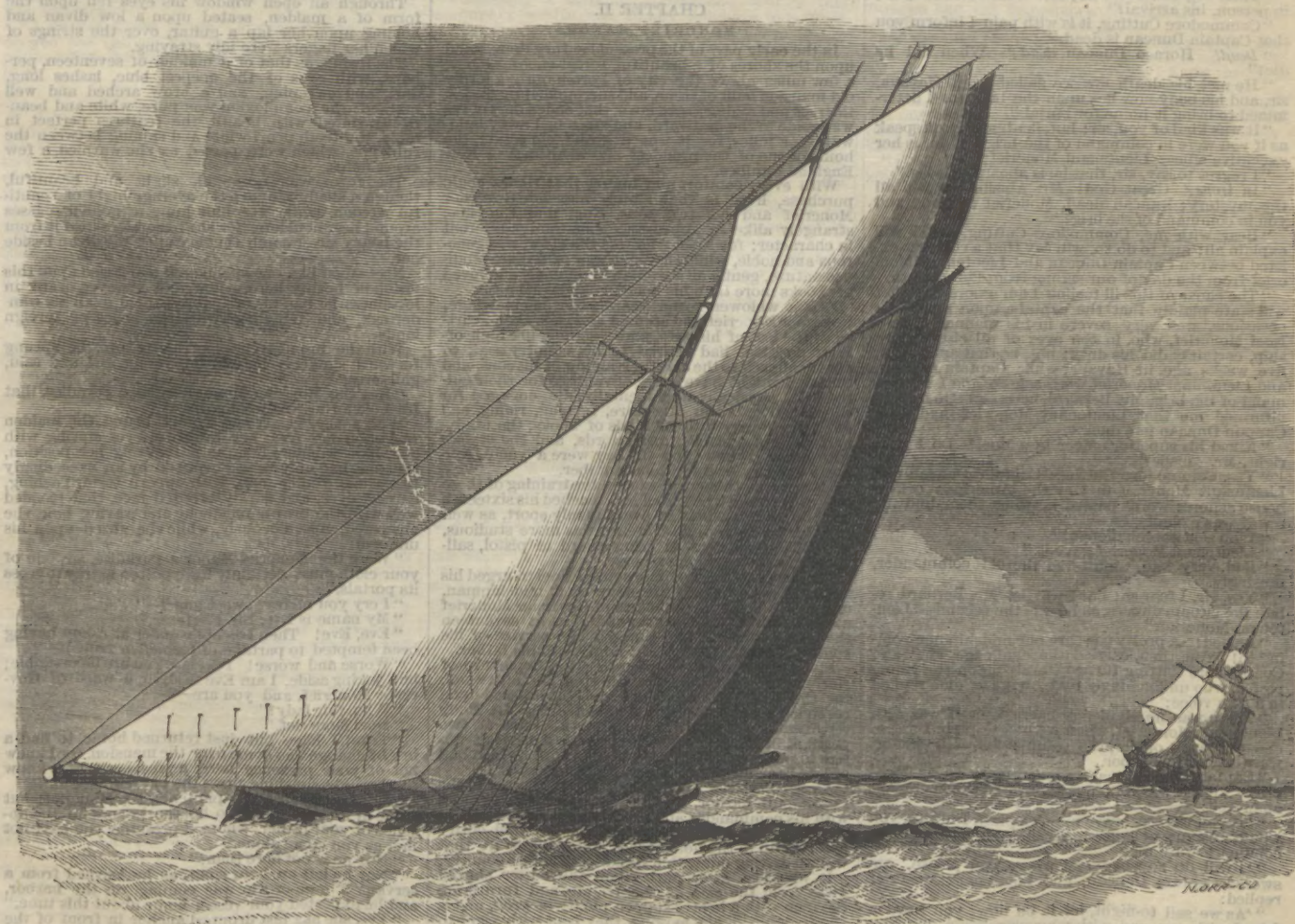
Astern, the sea was each moment darkening beneath the approach of night, while ahead, the west was a perfect halo of light, for the sun was near its setting, and lit up with prismatic hues the masses of clouds that, couch-like, appeared to await the retiring of the brilliant god of day.

Glancing with fiery vision eastward, over the vast expanse of restless waters the rays of golden sunlight fell upon the approaching vessel, gilding its tapering masts, casting a rosy tinge upon its voyage-stained canvas, and mingling its rainbow hues with the red, white and blue of the starry emblem of America, that floated above her armed decks.

Though several miles yet lay between the vessel and her destined haven of safety and rest, her decks were crowded with officers and crew, all gazing with interest upon the outlined land, with the glittering spires of Portsmouth in the distance, for in the city were many who were anxiously watching and waiting for the return home of the bold mariners who had so long roamed in foreign seas, though ever attended by kind prayers and wishes for their welfare.

Though joy shone on nearly every face on the vessel's decks, yet it was a joy mingled with sadness, and a certain awe, as ever and anon the eye of officer and seamen would turn from the autumn-tinged forests of the land, and fall upon a shrouded casket resting amidships, infolded in a large flag, and upon either side of which paced a marine with solemn tread; for beneath the ensign rested a human form, whom the loud and ringing cry of "Land ho!" had not startled into busy action, whose eyes gazed not longingly homeward, for the pulse of life beneath that somber canopy had been stilled by the icy touch of death.

Above the decks of the vessel—which was a large brig-of-war, well armed and manned, and stained with the rude buffets received in a long voyage—the flags floated at half-mast, a sad tidings to those who watched her approach from the land, that, mingled with their joy at her return, was a cup of bitterness to be drunk *in memoriam* of one, or more, of her brave crew, gone to that haven beyond the blue skies where storms are never known.



THE BRIG, THREE-QUARTERS OF A MILE ASTERN, WAS KEEPING UP A RAPID FIRE UPON THE FLYING VESSEL.

Shortly after sunset the brig-of-war dropped anchor off the town; her sails were quickly furled, and a few moments after a six-oared barge left her side, containing an officer, midshipman and coxswain, besides the seamen, and rowed rapidly away toward the main pier.

"Shove off from the shore, Pierson, and lay on your oars; under no circumstances hold communication with the townspeople until my return," said the officer, in a low tone, to the coxswain, as he sprang upon the shore and beckoned the midshipman to follow him.

Silently threading the dimly-lighted streets of Portsmouth, the officers walked rapidly along, as if familiar with them, until they came to the main thoroughfare, whereon stood a large and massive brick mansion.

"The commodore has company, doubtless, Calvin," said the elder officer, as the two entered the gateway and glanced upon the windows, which shed forth a blaze of light, while merry voices came from within.

"Yes, sir; it's a pity to mingle grief with pleasure," answered the young reeve, as he raised the brass knocker and let it fall with a heavy bang.

A negro servant in blue livery opened the door, and observing the uniforms of the visitors, said, politely:

"Walk in, gentlemen; the dancing is about to begin."

"We are not here for enjoyment, my man; lead us to a room where we can see Commodore Cutting in private," quickly answered the lieutenant, for such rank the light shining upon his uniform showed him to hold; and in obedience the servant led the way into a small room upon the left of the hallway, and bidding the gentlemen be seated, asked:

"Who am I to tell the commodore wishes to see him?"

"Say simply two officers."

"Yes, sir," and the black disappeared, and in five minutes more the door opened, and there entered a man of massive frame and distinguished bearing, clad in the uniform of a United States naval officer.

"Hal! am I to welcome home again Lieutenant Ainslie, of the Vulture, and you also, Mr. Bernard?" said Commodore Cutting, as he advanced into the room and gave each visitor his hand, in a frank, cordial manner.

"Yes, commodore; the brig has just dropped anchor, after two years' absence from home," said Lieutenant Alden Ainslie, a young man of fine appearance, with a manly form and open, daring face, bronzed by long exposure at sea.

"Then why came not Captain Duncan, to report, in person, his arrival?"

"Commodore Cutting, it is with pain I inform you that Captain Duncan is dead."

"Dead! Horace Duncan dead? When did he die?"

"He met his death ere we sailed from Havana, sir, and his body now lies upon the brig, for I determined to bring it home for burial."

"It was kind of you, sir; but, Lieutenant, you speak as if you were in command of the brig; where is her executive officer, Lieutenant Moncrief?"

"I regret to say, sir, that he is aboard in irons."

"In irons? Great God! Mr. Ainslie, explain all this mystery; Duncan dead, Moncrief in irons, and you in command of the brig?"

"Bear with me, Commodore Cutting, and I will explain all; and to do so, will say that a coldness existed between Captain Duncan and Lieutenant Moncrief from the day of our sailing from Portsmouth."

"The cause of this ill-feeling I am ignorant of, but will state plainly that the captain, upon numerous occasions, was very severe in his manner toward Noel Moncrief, who, in the eyes of all else aboard ship, certainly did his duty; but, be that as it may, five weeks ago, in Havana, while Captain Duncan and Lieutenant Moncrief were ashore, and I in command of the brig, Mr. Bernard, here, came to me and informed me that Lieutenant Moncrief had slain Captain Duncan in a duel."

"Killed his superior officer in a duel? Do I hear right, Mr. Ainslie?"

"Yes, Commodore Cutting; Captain Duncan and Lieutenant Moncrief met at the American coffee-house ashore; words passed between them, and the result was a challenge."

"Who sent the challenge?"

"Lieutenant Moncrief gave it."

"Bad, very bad," muttered the old commander, musingly.

"Yes, sir, I fear so; but I will let Mr. Bernard relate the circumstances, as he was the second of Lieutenant Moncrief."

"Indeed! A pretty pass are our midshipmen coming to! You, then, carried the challenge, sir?" and Commodore Cutting turned sternly upon the young reeve, who unflinchingly met his gaze, and replied in a firm voice:

"There was no challenge carried, sir; I was with Lieutenant Moncrief, when we met Captain Duncan and a French officer, the commander of a man-of-war then in the harbor."

"Captain Duncan made some remark to Mr. Moncrief; what it was, I do not know, and the lieutenant answered:

"If you were a brave man, Captain Duncan, you would give me a chance to resent your language and conduct toward me."

"I will do so when and where you please," answered Captain Duncan, and Lieutenant Moncrief replied:

"As we sail to-night, let it be now; you have a friend with you, and, with your permission, Midshipman Bernard will act for me."

"He has my permission; so let us take a car-

riage and drive out of the city's walls, for we wear our swords."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Mr. Moncrief, and half an hour afterward we were in a retired spot near Havana, and I, having arranged the preliminaries with the French officer, Captain Duncan and Lieutenant Moncrief were soon engaged in a fierce encounter."

"By Heaven! this is a strange and sad affair."

"Yes, sir, and one I was powerless to interrupt; but, to continue: Lieutenant Moncrief soon disarmed Captain Duncan and spared his life; but the captain demanding another bout, the lieutenant ran him through the heart in a very few minutes."

"Terrible! terrible! Our bravest and best officers thus destroying their lives and their reputations; but go on, sir."

"I immediately returned to the city with the body of the captain, and going aboard ship informed Lieutenant Ainslie of what had happened, and he went to the hotel where Lieutenant Moncrief told me he would await him."

"Yes, commodore," said Lieutenant Ainslie, "I immediately went ashore and ordered Captain Duncan's body to be embalmed, for removal home, and found Lieutenant Moncrief awaiting me."

"He did not attempt to escape, then?"

"No, sir; he surrendered himself, and of course I was compelled to put him in irons, to bring him back for trial."

"You did right, sir; it is a sad affair, and will bring great gloom upon our community; but, Mr. Bernard, though I do not censure you as much as I did at first, still you are not exonerated from blame in this matter, and I command you to return to your ship, and there consider yourself a prisoner until further orders."

The young reeve bowed without a word, and turned to leave the room, while the lieutenant, who was about to follow him, was called back by the commodore.

"The news you bring has cast a damper on my evening, Mr. Ainslie, for we were having a little merrymaking in my parlors; but I still would be happy of your company."

"Thanks, commodore; I had better return aboard ship, for there are those present who would eagerly ask me about the captain and lieutenant."

"True, true; let the matter be kept quiet until the morrow, and then I will come on board. Poor, poor Duncan; poor, poor Moncrief; I feel deeply, alike for the living and the dead," and so saying, the veteran commodore, and commander of the naval forces in and about Portsmouth harbor, warmly shook the hand of the young lieutenant, and after seeing him depart, returned to the gayeties within doors.

CHAPTER II.

MONCRIEF MANOR.

In the early part of the present century there stood upon the shores of a beautiful, forest-encircled bay, a few miles above the city of Portsmouth, a lordly old mansion built of stone, and surrounded by majestic trees and rolling green lawn, that ended only at the water's edge to the eastward, and stretched away landward for miles, for it was a grand old estate, the home of one of the proudest and wealthiest of New England families.

With every comfort and luxury that riches could purchase, lived in that stately mansion Governor Moncrief and his two sons, Noel and Clarence, strangely alike in appearance, but totally different in character: for Noel, who was the elder, was generous and noble, while Clarence was of a more studious nature, gentle as a woman in manner, and loved his books more than his horse, hounds and guns.

Left a widower seven years after his marriage, Governor Moncrief had seemed almost broken-hearted at the loss of his wife, and resigning his high official position, had retired to his country seat, to devote himself to the careful training of his sons, and that they might have every advantage for their cultivation, physically and mentally, he engaged for them instructors in literature, fencing, riding, and filled the library with all kinds of books, the study-hall with guns, pistols, and swords, and the stables with horses, while, upon the bay were a yacht, sail-boats and row-boats without number.

Thus was nothing neglected in the training of these two youths, and when Noel had reached his sixteenth year he was an adept in every manly sport, as well as a fair scholar, while Clarence was more studious, yet still a proficient in using sword or pistol, sailing a boat or managing a horse.

The result of this training caused Noel to urge his father to get him into the navy as a midshipman, and such a berth the influence of Governor Moncrief easily obtained for his son, and thus at seventeen the eldest brother had entered the service of his country, leaving Clarence at home with his father.

Five years passed away after the departure of Noel ere the young officer again trod his native soil, for the vessel to which he had been ordered upon receiving his appointment, had sailed for the Mediterranean sea, from whence, after a cruise of two years, it had been sent to the South American waters to make war upon the piratical crafts which had of late been attacking American commerce.

As soon as the anchor had been dropped in the Portsmouth harbor, Noel, who was a great favorite with his commander and brother officers, as well as the crew, obtained leave to take a four-oared cutter and row up to the homestead, preferring to go that way to driving out with a hired team across country.

It was just after dark when the cutter shoved away from the side of the frigate, and furnishing the men with a hearty supper, plenty of grog, and a comfortable night's lodging, they bent with vigor to their oars and soon left the lights of the city far astern, and wended their way rapidly along the

darkly-wooded shores, Noel at the helm, for he had relieved the coxswain of the duty, well knowing every curve of the channel.

On glided the boat for an hour or more, and then turned into the bay that washed the shores whereon the mansion stood, and ere long the lights from the windows gleamed brightly forth over the waters, welcoming the wanderer home after his years of absence.

"Rest on your oars, men," suddenly ordered Noel; as he was obeyed, and the steady dash of the blades in the water and click, click in the row-locks ceased, there came wafted upon the summer wind, over the quiet bay the sound of a bird-like voice singing some beautiful ballad, while, also distinctly heard, was the low thrumming of a guitar.

Entranced, all listened to the strains of melody floating on the wind, now rising clear and ringing, now falling low and thrilling, until the cadence affected even the seamen, and brought a tear of sympathy, caused by some bygone memory, to trickle down the bronzed cheeks.

"A strange, strange sound; a woman's voice in Moncrief Manor," said Noel, half-aloud, and then having waited some moments after the song ceased, as if longing for its renewal, he quietly ordered:

"Give way, men."

Once again came the steady stroke and dash, and once again the cutter glided rapidly along, Noel heading her toward a small pier, hidden almost by the darkly-overhanging forest.

"Lawrence, I wish to surprise them with my unexpected presence, so await here until I return for you," he said, springing ashore as the boat touched.

"Ay, ay, lieutenant, and a happy welcome to you," answered the coxswain.

"Yes, sir, the same to you from us," said the men.

"Thank you, one and all, my lads, and I assure you a hearty welcome will be given you also," and with a light tread and joyful heart, the young officer walked rapidly over the grounds in the direction of the mansion, which loomed grandly up beneath the forest trees.

As he placed his foot upon the first step of the broad stairway, there came once more the low notes of a guitar, and again the same rich voice of a woman welled forth upon the air, and this time singing a ballad dear to his childhood years, and one which he had often heard his mother sing.

"Who can she be?" he murmured, as she ceased, and then he continued:

"Be she old or young, ugly or beautiful, married or single, I love her for the music in her voice; but if I stand here I shall never know," and so saying he walked gently up the stairway, and stood upon the broad piazza that encircled the mansion.

Through an open window his eyes fell upon the form of a maiden, seated upon a low divan and holding upon her lap a guitar, over the strings of which her fingers were idly straying.

The form was that of a maiden of seventeen, perhaps, with eyes of the deepest blue, lashes long, dark and sweeping, and a brow arched and well marked; the complexion was pure, white and beautifully tinted with health, the features perfect in mold, the teeth pearl-white and shining between the ruby lips, which were parted as she warbled a few sweet notes.

The form was graceful, slight and beautiful, though a shadow above the average height of beautiful women, while the hair hung in golden masses around her shoulders, for she had unloosened it from the heavy silver comb that lay upon the divan beside her.

Noel stood like one spellbound and gazed upon this vision of beauty before him, and his eyes drank in loveliness he had never before beheld in all his wanderings, and mingling with the belles of foreign lands.

With the impulsiveness of his nature, he sprang forward suddenly before the young girl, and said, gallantly:

"Has the Moncrief Manor become a Paradise, that I behold an angel dwelling here?"

With a slight start and a quick bound the maiden was upon her feet, her beautiful eyes staring with deer-like wonder; but, as if realizing her position, that she had only been surprised by an exceedingly handsome young man, with superb form, flashing, earnest eyes, and darkly-bronzed face, that blended well with the brown mustache and waving hair, she answered, mischievously, while she gazed upon his uniform:

"Were the Moncrief Manor a Paradise, sir, one of your cloth must certainly have gotten astray to cross its portals."

"I cry you mercy, sweet angel—"

"My name is Eve, Sir Flatterer."

"Eve, Eve! Then I do not wonder at Adam having been tempted to partake of forbidden fruit if—"

"Worse and worse! I declare you are incorrigible; but, joking aside, I am Eve Eldred, a ward of Governor Moncrief, and you are—"

"Who, fair lady?"

"Noel Moncrief."

"True; I have but just returned home, to find a bright change has come over the mansion, for I knew not of your presence here, a presence that I know has brought sunshine upon the old homestead."

"There, no more compliments, Mr. Moncrief; but come in and allow me to do the honors in the absence of your father, whom, I presume, you have not met as you come alone."

"No; he is not here then?"

"No; he left an hour since, as he learned from a servant a man-of-war was coming up the harbor, and he expected your vessel home about this time."

"Yes, she has just dropped anchor in front of the town; but Clarence, my brother, where is he?"

"You are indeed like a stranger in a strange land,

not to know your brother entered the navy a year since."

"Gone into the navy, Miss Eldred? Why, what could have come over the boy to have thus changed his views?"

"It must have been hearing of your distinguished services and rapid promotion," replied the maiden, archly, and then, she continued quickly:

"I hear wheels upon the drive; your father has returned."

A moment after, a tall dignified man stepped from a carriage and quickly ascended the stairway, the next moment to greet with a warm, fatherly welcome his long-absent son.

"Stand off, Noel, and let me look upon you. Why, you are now a magnificent-looking man, even if your father does say it; and, boy, I am proud of you, for your gallant services are known to all; but, how is it I find you here, when I went to meet you?"

"I came in cutter from the vessel, sir; and that reminds me, I must look after the comfort of my men, who now await me at the pier."

"Certainly; let Thomas go after them and give them supper and comfortable quarters. Eve, my dear, will you tell Thomas, and also see to preparing tea for this wanderer."

"Certainly, sir; I was just intending to do so, when you arrived," answered the young girl, as she arose and left the room.

"Father, to what lucky circumstance do you owe the presence of that lovely creature in the mansion?" asked Noel, as she disappeared.

"Ha, my boy, you are also doomed, I fear. She is the daughter of General Eldred, who you know was a distinguished officer in the Revolution, and upon his deathbed, two years ago, he made me the guardian, as well of her property as herself, for she is an heiress."

"This is vacation, and she is now at the mansion for the second time; the first time, Clarence had just come home from college, and they became great friends."

"Clarence is now in the navy, Miss Eldred tells me."

"Yes; he gave me no rest until I obtained a position for him, and he is now on a foreign cruise; but, really, I believe Eve drove him there, for she doats on the service, and spoke so highly of you—"

"Of me, father?"

"Yes, it was about the time you captured that pirate schooner, with accounts of which the papers were full, and, finding that Eve would not love him, poor Clarence left home to endeavor to forget her, or to strive to win her by a gallant naval career; but, here she comes, and I warn you, Noel, not to let her steal your heart, for every man in Portsmouth is in love with her."

"I do not doubt it, sir," answered Noel, as he obeyed the call of Eve, and entered the supper-room, where he found a substantial meal awaiting him.

CHAPTER III. THE FALSE FRIEND.

Upon account of their long cruise, the officers of the man-of-war, to which Noel Moncrief was attached, were given by the Secretary of War a leave of absence for three months, and this time the young lieutenant intended passing at home, in the society of his father and the lovely Eve, in whom, at first sight, he had been most deeply interested.

With a character as lovely as her person, Eve Eldred had won the hearts of all who knew her, young or old, and, strange to say, for among women it is an exception, she was most popular with her own sex.

Young, beautiful, an heiress, it was not to be wondered at that Eve soon found herself surrounded by hosts of admirers, all willing to offer their hands and fortunes, or, if poor, to share with her their humble earnings.

But to all the maiden had turned a deaf ear, although some surmised that Clarence Moncrief would be the fortunate winner of the prize.

True, he was her most constant companion, and seemed to idolize her very footprints; but then it was natural for him to be much with her, as being the adopted daughter of Governor Moncrief, the two were daily associates.

Yet Eve Eldred bestowed upon Clarence Moncrief only the affection of a sister, and this the young man soon discovered, to his great mortification, while he listened with real ill-feeling to her praises of his brother Noel, then absent in the service of his country.

At length, finding that his love appeared hopeless, Clarence determined to strive to win the heart of the fair maiden beneath the uniform of a naval officer, and gave his father no rest until he had gained for him a position in the navy, which the governor had obtained through his great influence with government, although the young man was rather too old for the berth of a midshipman.

Delighted at his success, Clarence had left home, and, a year before the return of Noel, had departed upon a foreign cruise, hoping that upon his return, he would be able to win Eve to love him.

Yet, though Eve had turned a listless ear to the entreaties of Clarence, it was soon evident that the handsome, daring brother, Noel Moncrief, was not indifferent to her, for hardly had the young lieutenant been at home a month ere the two were deeply in love, the one with the other, so rapidly does love work havoc in the human heart.

Noel compared Eve with all the lovely women he had known, from the German baroness to the Spanish senorita, and candidly confessed to himself that not one of them would compare with the ward of his father; while Eve, upon her part, confessed to her heart that the dark, earnest eyes, and fascinat-

ing smile of Noel certainly impressed her more favorably than all the looks and speeches of the generals, commodores, judges, titled foreigners and ordinary citizens whom she had met, and they were not a few, for her father, General Eldred, always had lived in the city of Washington up to the time of his death.

Thus were the two desperately in love, for Eve accompanied Noel on horseback-rides, drives, boating excursions, and even went hunting with him sometimes, while for indoor amusement they sung together, for both had fine voices, sketched together, for each was a fair amateur artist, and read together.

This was dangerous sport for two young, handsome and generous natured people, as we all know, or should know, reader mine, and the result was just what Governor Moncrief predicted—a love-match that ended in an engagement.

Governor Moncrief willingly gave his consent—though with a pang at thought of the pain it would cause poor Clarence upon his return; but then, he felt that Eve loved Noel and not Clarence, and therefore no one was to blame in the matter, excepting the little god Cupid, who, in shooting his love-arrows into the heart of Clarence, had instilled them with the poison of unrequited affection.

The governor, however, stipulated that the maiden must return to school, where she had before been, in New York, and complete her education, while Noel must once more start forth upon a foreign cruise, and endeavor to win the rank of a captain ere he became a Benedict.

Both the lovers agreed to this, for Eve wished to complete her studies, and Noel was also anxious to win promotion, and already knew that he was to sail, ere long, as the executive officer of a brig-of-war commanded by Horace Duncan, one of his most intimate friends, and he did not doubt, from the service for which the vessel was destined, but that he could win by gallant service a step higher up the grade of promotion that would make him a captain.

The brig-of-war was then being fitted out at Portsmouth, and two months before the time for sailing, Captain Horace Duncan arrived, to superintend in person the preparing of his vessel for sea.

Horace Duncan was the senior, by ten years, of Noel Moncrief, but when on a foreign station the two had met and become great friends, although one was lieutenant and the other only a midshipman at that time.

Captain Duncan was an able officer, had distinguished himself upon several occasions, and though proud and severe, was nevertheless quite popular with his messmates and crew.

Possessing a striking appearance, and a fair amount of wealth, and family influence to a great extent, he had a brilliant career before him in the service of his country, and his heart throbbed with pride and pleasure when he received orders to take command of the brig-of-war.

Arriving at Portsmouth, he was doubly rejoiced to find that Noel Moncrief was to be second in command, for he well knew the worth of his young friend, while, glad to meet again his former companion, Noel had at once invited him to Moncrief Manor, to become his guest until the day set for sailing, saying he could drive or row to the city every day, to look after the fitting out of the brig.

Horace Duncan readily accepted the invitation, especially when it was urged by the governor, and at once removed his traps out to the mansion.

Then for the first time he met Eve Eldred, and from the moment of that meeting became her slave, for he madly loved her.

But, instead of being purified by his love for the beautiful and noble girl, his heart became callous to the promptings of honor, and when he knew that she loved Noel, from that moment he secretly hated his generous-hearted lieutenant, and determined to tear from him, by fair or foul means, the maiden of his love.

With every noble impulse deadened within him, he set to work secretly to destroy the love of the maiden for Noel, and in other cases, where love was less strong, might have succeeded by his many innuendoes cast upon the character of his lieutenant; but, with a woman's penetration and knowledge of human nature, Eve saw through the work of Horace Duncan, and at once made known to Noel all that had been said, and the true character of his supposed friend.

Noel had not suspected aught of Horace Duncan; but when his eyes were opened to his villainy, he became thoroughly aroused and determined to demand an explanation of his unwarrantable conduct in thus abusing the privilege of a guest, to injure him with the woman of his love.

Just as he had come to this determination, Horace Duncan entered the room, holding in his hand an official-looking document, while he said, quickly:

"Noel, I have just received orders from the Secretary of the Navy to sail at once for the Caribbean Sea, where I am to be sent on the service of pirate-hunting, and most fortunate is it that you are to be with me, for your knowledge of these waters is, I believe, considerable."

Noel, Moncrief, choked back the words that had risen to his lips, and as the orders to depart would take Captain Duncan and himself away from the society of Eve, he determined not to speak upon the matter to his commander, though he felt that he could never again be friends with him.

"I am glad we have to go, captain, although the orders are sudden; when do you intend to sail?"

"To-morrow night; and now I must take my leave of your father and Miss Eldred, for my duties aboard ship will keep me busy," and in half an hour more Horace Duncan was driving to Portsmouth; while his heart was filled with bitter hatred toward Noel, and the determination to, in some way, get

rid of him during the voyage, that he might return and claim Eve as his bride.

The next morning Noel bade farewell to his father and Eve, and by noon was on board the brig-of-war, which soon after weighed anchor, and stood out of the harbor before a light breeze.

Gliding quietly along, while her captain was in the cabin, preparing his last dispatches to send ashore by the pilot, Noel, who was in command of the deck, descried a small fishing-skiff standing out from the rock-bound coast, and heading so as to meet the brig.

In the skiff were two persons, one of whom stood in the bow and waved toward the brig, as if to attract the attention of those on board.

"Let her luff, helmsman; more yet, for I would speak yonder boat," said Noel, and in a few moments the light skiff was alongside and a rope thrown to the occupants.

"Well, sir, what excuse have you for boarding one of Uncle Sam's sea warriors in this style?" said Noel, to one of the men who sprang upon the brig's deck. "I have an important letter, sir, for Lieutenant Moncrief."

"Ha! I am Noel Moncrief; give it me."

The fisherman drew from his pocket a letter, and handing it to Noel, said:

"A young lady came down to the shore on horseback, a short while ago, and gave me the letter, and said she would give me a gold ten if I would sail out and head off the brig, so that you might get it."

"You have done well, my man, and here is a twin gold-piece for you; but hold, there may be an answer."

"No, sir; she went right away, and said there was no answer."

"All right; go to the mansion of Governor Moncrief, seek the young lady, and let her know you delivered the package."

"I will, sir; thank you, lieutenant, for the gold, and a pleasant cruise and safe return to you," answered the fisherman, politely, as he sprang into his skiff, which at once fell astern of the brig.

Too thorough an officer to neglect his duties, to read what he believed only a last kind word from Eve, Noel devoted himself wholly to the care of the brig until she was heading on her southward course, when he called to Lieutenant Ainslie, the next officer in command, and bade him hold the deck while he went to his own state-room.

There he hastily broke the seal and read in the handwriting of Eve, as follows:

"MONCRIEF MANOR."

"MY OWN NOEL:—Believing there would be no further communication with the shore, Captain Horace Duncan had the impudence to send me the note which I inclose for your perusal."

"Determined to prove to you his falsity as a man of honor and a friend, I have ordered my horse, to ride to a point on the coast which I know the brig will pass, to send this to you by some fisherman."

"But, Noel, promise me, I beg of you, that you will only act toward Captain Duncan as his superior rank demands, and in no way allow him to know the knowledge you possess."

"Feeling you will do this, for my sake, and urging you to guard well your life, believe me,

"Ever devotedly yours,

"EVE ELDRED."

With a dark brow, Noel folded the letter, and then turned to the one inclosed, which was written in the bold hand of Horace Duncan, and read:

"BRIG-OF-WAR, VULTURE,
PORTSMOUTH HARBOR."

"MISS EVE ELDRED—LADY:—Without again telling you of the deep and never-changing love I feel for you, let me now, in this parting hour, and with no feeling of envy or jealousy, warn you against the man to whom you are betrothed."

"I have known Noel Moncrief for years, and dark indeed are the stains upon his character, which, if known to you, I feel would at once cause you to tear his image from your memory."

"Now, I cannot say more, and it is with pain I speak against one that has been my kind host; but to save you is my excuse, and believe me, upon my return home, I will prove to you, and to the world, all that I say regarding him."

"Trusting the seed of distrust I have sown will bring forth good fruit, and thus save you from ruin in the end, believe me,

"With esteem and love,

"HORACE DUNCAN."

"Horace Duncan, a bitter ending will come to either you or me, for this."

"Sir!" Noel glanced quickly up, and saw standing before him his commander, his face pale with rage.

"You heard my words, Captain Duncan, and you see in my hands your letter to Miss Eldred; henceforth between you and me only shall there be the courtesy due to duty."

"Where did you get that letter?" "A fisherman brought it to me, half an hour since."

"Then you know me, Noel Moncrief?"

"Ay, that I do, Horace Duncan; but between us let there be no quarrel, until the end of this cruise, for our services are at present devoted to our country, and as my commander I will obey your every order," and Noel gazed sternly into the face of the man before him.

"So be it."

Thus it was the good brig Vulture started forth upon her voyage, with her captain and lieutenant feeling the bitterest hatred for each other in their hearts, though outwardly there appeared to be a friendly understanding between them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEAMAN'S DEVOTION.

HAVING made the reader aware of the circumstance of the flags of the brig-of-war Vulture being at half-mast, and explained who it was resting beneath the funeral canopy upon her decks, I will now continue on with my story, taking up the thread where it was broken, to present to the reader's eye those characters in this romance who are most conspicuously brought forward.

Standing by the brig's gangway, as Lieutenant Ainslie and Midshipman Bernard descended into the cutter to be rowed ashore, was a tall, ungainly seaman, whose appearance was only remarkable for its peculiarity.

Over six feet in height, awkwardly but powerfully formed, with long, swinging arms and immense breadth of chest, the man's appearance indicated great strength, without any sign of agility, to the casual observer; but, though looking awkward and lumbering, his every motion was catlike in quickness, and his dark, restless eyes were ever on the alert.

Though remarkable in form, the face of the individual was even more remarkable, for the head was small, the mouth immense and overhung by an enormous nose, while the eyes were bright, large, and as beautiful in expression as a woman's.

Who the man was, where he hailed from, or what was his name, none knew, for he had been found aboard the brig when she sailed from Portsmouth, gave no account of himself, and only said, when the paymaster asked his name:

"Put me down as Stranger, please, sir."

And as Stranger he was entered upon the brig's roll, as a first-class seaman, for such he soon proved himself to be.

Inoffensive, and holding friendly intercourse with none of the crew, the seamen soon began to jibe him upon his awkward form and ugliness, all of which Stranger bore without a word, until, upon one occasion, a party of his messmates made some slurring remarks upon his parentage, and as quick as a flash of light he sprung into their midst, seized the two insulters in his powerful arms, and hurled them overboard into the sea.

"Man overboard!" rung the cry; the brig was brought up into the wind, a boat was lowered, and the two men were saved and brought aboard, both, however, fearfully frightened.

An investigation of the matter caused Captain Duncan to order Stranger up to the mast, to be punished with the "cat"—a punishment he received, in spite of the earnest entreaties of Lieutenant Moncrief, and other officers, in his behalf.

Stranger took the lash without a murmur, and when released, stepped forward, took the hand of Noel Moncrief, raised it to his lips silently, and walked forward, the simple act causing a sneer upon the face of Horace Duncan, while others were deeply touched by this simple mode of thanks.

A few months more, and again Stranger became an object of ridicule among his messmates, and, unmindful of his former punishment, he was about to spring upon his foes, when the ringing voice of Noel Moncrief, who was officer of the deck, and had witnessed the whole affair, restrained him, and, like a whipped schoolboy, he slunk away.

"Mr. Bernard, have that gang of seamen walked aft here, sir," called out Noel to the young reefer, and he pointed to the men who had been teasing the deformed seaman.

The order was quickly obeyed, and five of the crew, those whom Noel had marked as the offenders, were brought aft, and the young lieutenant said, in stern tones:

"Men, I am going to have no more of this worry brought upon a poor unfortunate man, whom God has not made as well formed as you are; some months ago Stranger was severely punished for defending himself, when driven to madness by your taunts, and I now intend you shall suffer the same punishment."

"Boatswain, pipe all hands aft to see punishment administered."

The "cat" was well laid on, and from that day poor Stranger received no more jeers from his messmates, and from that day also he became the devoted friend of Noel Moncrief.

Thus he was standing quietly by the gangway, watching the departure of Lieutenant Ainslie for the shore, when, as the officer got into the boat, the buckle of his sword-belt broke in twain.

"Here, sir, take this sword-belt into my cabin, and bring me another you will find lying upon the table," he called out, and springing forward, Stranger eagerly seized the belt and darted into the cabin, his face lit up with a strange light, as if of triumph.

An instant only was he gone, when he returned with the belt and handed it to the young lieutenant, who at once gave the order to the men to let fall their oars and give way.

In one of the officers' state-rooms upon the brig, as she sailed up the harbor toward her anchorage, there was one person seated in solemn and gloomy thought, for the return home, after a two years' cruise, presented to him no bright side, no happy picture.

True, he had won renewed honor, and his name had been mentioned for promotion, but still his mind was clouded with thought, and his face pale and stern as he glanced through the open port, through which was run out a heavy gun.

The state-room was large, and contained, besides the gun, a berth, closet, and chest, while the walls were hung round with uniforms, storm-suits, and hats.

As the officer, for his dress indicated him to be such, moved to get a better view through the port, as a change in the brig's course brought her broadside to the city, the sound of chains broke on the

ear, and it could be seen that each ankle was encircled by an iron band chaining him to the floor.

The man in irons was Noel Moncrief, who was returning to his home and native land with the blood of his superior officer upon his hands.

"Oh, God!" he murmured, "to this return, when only two short years ago all seemed to me so bright, and I looked forward with joy to the moment when the brig would again drop anchor here."

"Did you call, sir?" suddenly asked a voice, and the form of a marine stood in the doorway.

"No, sir; close the door and keep out," sternly said Noel.

"I certainly heard you speak," answered the man, suspiciously.

"That may be; I was talking to myself; but, why this extra watchfulness?"

"We are getting into port now, lieutenant, and you have many friends aboard, who would not like to see you hanged, and I intend to see that you do not escape," insolently said the marine.

"Am I to be obeyed, sir? I ordered you to your post outside that door."

"You are not on the quarter-deck now, lieutenant," said the man, menacingly, as he withdrew, muttering some unkind words to himself against the chained officer, for he was one of the five that Noel had had punished for their conduct toward the deformed seaman.

For some time he sat in silence, heard the order from the deck to take in sail and lower away the stream-anchor, and shortly afterward saw the boat, containing Lieutenant Ainslie and Midshipman Bernard row away toward the city.

"Yes, there they go to make my crime, as it will be called, known to the world; yet I do not blame poor Ainslie, for stern duty alone compels him to act as my foe."

"Hark! listen to the hum from the city, and mingling with it is the sound of a brass band."

"Ah's me! I fear there is no hope for me, and that I must die. A terrible, terrible end for one in the flush of youth."

Suddenly he ceased, and leaning his arms upon the iron gun he rested his head thereon, and in a few moments was fast asleep.

How long he slept he knew not, but he awoke to find that all was still around him, except the measured tread of the officer of the deck, as he paced to and fro upon his lonely watch.

The hum from the town had ceased, and only a light here and there glimmered from the dark masses of houses, showing that the night was creeping on apace.

Suddenly he was startled by a slight sound outside his door, followed by a suppressed breathing, and then a low groan.

"What can it mean? The ship is at rest," he muttered, but ere he could say more the door was softly opened and a tall form stepped cautiously within.

"Lieutenant Moncrief!"

"Well, who is it, and what do you wish?"

"It is Stranger. I have come to save you," said the voice, in a low whisper.

"I thank you, my good man; but I cannot fly."

"You will have to die, for I heard Lieutenant Ainslie and Mr. Bernard say the commodore said it would go hard with you."

"I expect to die, Stranger."

"Not if I can save you; come, let me unlock your manacles."

"What, you have the keys?"

"Yes, sir, I knew where the lieutenant kept them, for I saw him place them in a drawer in his cabin, and, by good fortune, to-night, he sent me there on an errand, and I secured them."

"Stranger, you are a noble fellow, and I will not gain my liberty and leave you to suffer, as you certainly would have to do."

"I will go with you, lieutenant, for I would give my life for you," answered the seaman, honestly.

"And whither, my man?"

"Anywhere, sir, where you would go. Come, Mr. Moncrief, you are young, handsome and rich; the world is before you, and there are parts of it where you could go and live in happiness, and if you remain here you will have to die like a dog, merely because you punished a man who had made himself your bitterest foe."

Noel Moncrief was dumb with surprise, to hear a man, whom he looked upon as a common seaman, speak thus, and use language wholly free from the forecastle style, and, as if momentarily forgetting his own dangerous position, he said:

"Stranger, you are not what you seem; you have seen better days."

"Ay, have I, Lieutenant Moncrief, and there will come a day when I will make known to you my life; but time presses and we must fly."

"No, good Stranger, I will not fly; I will remain and stand my trial, and bravely meet my end. I thank you for this noble act upon your part; so give me your hand and return at once ere you are discovered."

"It is too late now to retract."

"Why, what mean you? Were you seen to come here?"

"No, but you forget the marine."

"Ha! what of him? how did you pass the man on duty?"

"That sentinel's off duty forever!"

"Do you mean he's dead?" asked Noel, in a low tone.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What! you—"

"Yes, I slew him only a few moments since, and if you do not fly I will remain and suffer with you."

Noel Moncrief dropped his head in his hands and pondered a moment, and then said:

"Stranger, my good man, you have conquered,

for though I would not fly to save myself, I know if I remain both of us must die, and you shall not suffer death for me. Unlock my manacles."

Gladly the seaman released Noel of his chains, and then, stepping forward, he locked the state-room door, and drew from beneath his shirt a short rope which he fastened to the gun-carriage.

"Now slip down quickly into the water, lieutenant."

"You go first."

"Will you follow, sir?"

"I will."

Without another word the seaman gently and noiselessly lowered himself into the water, and the next moment was followed by Noel.

"Now let us float with the tide, which is setting in," whispered Stranger, and releasing their hold upon the rope the two men were borne swiftly away up the harbor, undiscovered by the officer of the deck, as he leaned idly upon a gun-carriage and gazed toward the sleeping town.

CHAPTER V.

THE SADDEST BLOW OF ALL.

AFTER swimming for half an hour Noel and his preserver reached the shore, at a point where there were several fishing skiffs anchored, and, a sudden idea flashing across his mind, the young lieutenant said:

"Stranger, let us take one of these boats, for the wind and tide are both fair, and in a short while I can run up to Moncrief Manor, for I cannot decide upon my future until I have held conversation with one person."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the seaman, and in a moment more the two men were in the light skiff; the mast was stepped, the sail spread, and, with Noel at the tiller, the little craft sped on before a stiff breeze, past the quiet town.

Half an hour was passed, when Stranger, who was in the bow, said, quietly:

"I hear the sound of oars and voices in conversation ahead, sir."

"Doubtless some pleasure-party returning from the town; there is no danger of our being recognized, so I'll stand on."

A few moments more and there came distinctly to the ears of Noel the steady thud of oars, and a number of voices mingling in conversation.

"It is as I expected, a pleasure-party. I will luff up and pass to windward of them, and if they hail us, say we are fishermen."

Swiftly the light skiff cut through the waves, and in ten minutes more was within a few yards of the boat, a large eight-oared barge, with a canvas awning and comfortable seats, which Noel at once recognized as belonging to Moncrief Manor, and used by his father for pleasure-parties on the bay and river.

"You answer their hail, Stranger, if they should speak us."

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the seaman, and as he spoke, the sound of a man's voice came across the water, making some lively remark to some one in the bow of the barge.

"By Heaven! that was the voice of my brother Clarence. He is at home, then; and—yes, I hear her low, musical laugh. Well, it is well for her to laugh now, for ere long tears may dim her eyes, when she knows that Horace Duncan has fallen by my hand, and that I am doomed to die for slaying my superior officer."

"Poor, poor Eve! Hard indeed did I strive to suffer everything for your sake, and without a murmur I put up with his unkindness, until his last insulting remark before that French captain and Bernard, reflecting upon your honor, caused me to resent his evil words."

"Well, the die is cast, and branded with murder, and dishonored from the navy, I must fly wheresoever the path of fate may lead me. Stranger!"

"Sir."

"We have passed them without their hailing, and I now intend to run on and land at my home, where I will remain concealed in an arbor, to await the coming of the party from yonder boat, which contains my brother and other friends."

"You remain in the skiff, when I land, and I will soon return."

"Yes, sir; will you put on this sword which I brought with me under my coat? I took it from your state-room with your brace of pistols, which are dry, I see, as I rolled them up in their oiled-silk cover."

"Thanks; I will take the sword and one pistol, while you keep the other."

"I have two pistols and my cutlass, sir."

"Indeed; why you were a floating arsenal, Stranger, and swam as easily as if you carried nothing with you."

"Yes, sir, I swim well; but I brought arms, lieutenant, thinking we might need them."

"Yes, we may need them; but here we are at the shore; so take in the sail and I'll run the skiff beneath the shadow of this tree," said Noel, and the next instant the small boat was completely hidden beneath the overhanging branches of a majestic willow, and with a light bound the young lieutenant sprang ashore, buckled on his sword, stuck his pistols in his belt, and, after a word of caution to Stranger, walked away in the direction of the mansion, which loomed up dark and grandly a few hundred yards distant.

Following the gravel path along the water's edge, Noel passed the small pier, the regular boat-landing of the mansion, and a glance down the bay showed him the barge, half a mile away, pulling steadily shoreward, while, moored against the pier-head, was a little yacht of fifteen tons, which he had had built after a model of his own, for both speed and com-

fort, and in which himself and brother had enjoyed many a cruise together, years before.

"The Dart has been overhauled and refitted, I see; doubtless Clarence has brought her into service again," he said, as he stepped on board the little schooner and walked up and down her deck.

"But yonder comes the barge, and I must hasten," and so saying he walked on toward the mansion for a few paces, until he came to a small, ivy-grown summer-house, which he entered quietly.

Soon the pleasure-barge struck the shore, for it had been delayed by stopping at several mansions along the river, to land parties who had accepted the invitation of Clarence Moncrief, to go that way to the entertainment given by Commodore Cutting, in Portsmouth.

The oarsmen sprung ashore, and bidding good-night to Clarence and Eve, started rapidly homeward along the shores of the bay, for they were fishermen living near Moncrief Manor, while the young man and maiden walked slowly, arm-in-arm toward the mansion.

From his place of concealment Noel watched their approach, and was about to advance to meet them, when the words spoken by his brother arrested his steps.

Clarence was saying:

"Then you still persist in loving Noel?"

"I do, Clarence, and it is ignoble in you to endeavor to steal my affection from him when he is absent," answered Eve, firmly.

"Curse him! Yes, Eve Eldred, for your sake I curse my brother, and would to God he might never return."

"Clarence, this is unmanly, this is ungenerous, and I will not listen to you thus speak of one who has ever loved you, ever been just and kind toward you."

"Hold, Eve Eldred! Stand here and listen to me," and seizing her hand, Clarence Moncrief stopped just in front of the summer-house, and continued in a low, bitter tone:

"You were mine once—"

"No, sir, I never loved you, except as a brother."

"You were not indifferent to me, and when I knew you liked and praised Noel, because he was in the navy, I also entered the service, hoping to gain more favor in your eyes; but, during my absence, Noel came, and stole from me your heart, and now, after three years, I come back to find you his betrothed wife; no, Eve Eldred, you shall never marry Noel Moncrief, if I have to slay him with my own hand, and be Cain-cursed forever. No, I hate him, and you shall be mine."

"Never, sir!"

Both started at the stern, deep voice, and glancing up saw before them the tall, manly form of Noel Moncrief, for the moon, upon the wane, was just rising over the forest and fell brightly upon the spot where they stood.

"Noel! thank God you have come!" and with a glad cry Eve threw herself into his arms, while Clarence, in dismay, laid his hand upon his sword-hilt.

"Wait, Eve, and listen to me:

"A few hours ago the Vulture dropped anchor in Portsmouth harbor, but with no rejoicing did she return after her long and successful cruise, for upon her decks lay the dead form of her captain—"

"Killed!"

"Yes, Eve, slain by my hand, in a duel, ere we left Havana."

"Oh, my God, my poor, poor heart will break!" cried Eve, while Clarence, whose whole nature seemed to have turned to bitterness, said, harshly:

"You are a murderer then, sir?"

"Listen to me, sir! Eve, this is no time for tears, for I would have you hear me."

"Yes, I slew him, after first disarming him and giving him his life; for months I bore with him for your sweet sake, and had he not at length spoken evil of you, I would have still suffered on until our return home; but, he went too far; he fell by my hand, and I was brought home in irons."

"An hour since, I escaped; how, it matters not, but I would not have done so had not a noble man implicated himself in my behalf; and, taking a skiff, I came on here, to make known to you and to my father all, after which I intended to seek a foreign land, where, if you loved me, I wished you to join me."

"Noel, I will follow you to the uttermost ends of the earth!" cried Eve, passionately, as she placed her hands firmly upon his shoulder.

"Never! that woman is mine, and never shall she be the wife of another man!" and drawing his sword Clarence leaped forward.

"Brother, put up your weapon, for I would not cross blades with you, even though your words this night told me that you hated me, and that you no longer loved me as in boyhood years," said Noel, softly.

"No, Sir Murderer, I hate you, for you have taken from me the love of Eve Eldred."

"Clarence, I never loved you, and no word or look of mine ever caused you to believe so. Shame on you, to curse and hate a brother!" and Eve turned with flashing eyes upon the young man.

"Eve, this is idle talk. By this man's own words he is a murderer, and I will deliver him up to the authorities; he will be hung, and then you shall be mine."

"Brother! Clarence! beware, or you may go too far."

"What! do you threaten me?" and with a bitter cry of hatred Clarence sprung forward with drawn sword.

"Oh, God have mercy, but this is terrible!" cried Eve, covering her face with her hands.

"Stand aside, Eve; I will not hurt him," said Noel,

and quickly drawing his sword, the two blades crossed, flashed for one instant in the moonlight, and the weapon of Clarence was struck from his hand.

With another cry of hatred, he drew a pistol, and fired it full in the face of his brother, but, anticipating it, Noel struck it up with his sword, and the ball passed above his head.

Instantly the hand of Clarence again sought his belt for another pistol; but quickly Noel sprung forward, and his sword passed through the body of his brother, who fell with a stifled moan to the ground.

"Eve, I have killed him. Now I care not to live."

"Noel, you must live. Fly, for already I hear the house alarmed. For my sake fly."

"Whither?"

"Come with me, sir; quick, or escape will be impossible," said the stern voice of Stranger, who had hastened to the spot when he heard the clash of swords.

"No, good Stranger, save yourself, and here is my belt of gold."

"No, sir, you must come with me," answered the seaman, firmly.

"Yes, for my sake, fly, Noel," and Eve threw her arms around him with passionate earnestness.

One close embrace, and then, led by Stranger, Noel strode rapidly away in the direction of the skiff.

"Yonder is a yacht; let us take that, for then we have some chance."

"All right, my man; it belongs to me," and the excitement of escape causing him to, momentarily, forget the deed his hand had wrought, and the misery he had left behind him, Noel sprung on board the little vessel, already mentioned as moored to the pier; the sails were raised with lightning rapidity, the hawsers cast loose, and, feeling the wind, the graceful Dart swung clear of the dock, and with her master at the helm stretched across the bay, just as a glance astern showed that an alarmed crowd from the mansion had arrived at the spot, where lay the body of Clarence Moncrief, with Eve Eldred standing in an agony of grief beside it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLIGHT FOR LIFE.

COMMODORE CUTTING was so much distressed at the sad news brought him by Lieutenant Ainslie, for both Captain Duncan and Noel Moncrief he greatly liked, that he determined, as soon as the guests had departed, to go aboard the brig and see Noel, to endeavor to glean from him all particulars in his favor, regarding the duel and its fatal termination.

So deciding, he escorted the party, who had been his guests, down to the water's edge where the barge awaited them, and refraining, through a kindness of heart, from informing Clarence that his brother had been brought home in irons, he merely asked him to come in with the governor, his father, at an early hour the following morning, as he was desirous of seeing them upon a matter of great importance.

Clarence promised, and bidding the commodore good-night, and thanking him for his generous hospitality, the barge shoved off, and the crew, singing a merry song in chorus, headed up the river.

Returning to his mansion he sat down to write some dispatches, and then calling to his servant, ordered his private cutter to await his coming at the foot of the street.

"Yes, I will go on board, and learn fully all about this sad affair, so that in the morning I can make known the full particulars to his father and brother. Poor, rash boy! I fear he must die," and so saying the commodore wrapped himself up in his heavy cloak, and putting on a slouch hat, walked from the mansion down to the river, where he found the boat in readiness.

Seating himself in the stern-sheets, he said, simply: "Give way, men; coxswain, steer for the brig-of-war anchored below, and, mind you, do not let it be known to the crew who I am."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the coxswain, and with measured stroke the cutter moved away, and in a short time was hailed from the Vulture, with:

"Boat, ahoy!"

"Dispatches for the commander," answered the commodore.

"Come alongside."

"Ay, ay," and the next instant Commodore Cutting stood on the deck of the Vulture, and was met by Lieutenant Ainslie, who, recognizing him immediately, conducted him into the cabin.

"Ainslie, I could not sleep, so I have come on board to have a talk with you and poor Moncrief."

"I am glad to see you, commodore. Be seated, sir, and I will send for him," politely answered the young lieutenant.

"No, I would not be seen by the crew. Go for him, and also bring young Bernard, for if there is any thing in favor of the poor fellow I would find it out."

"I thank you, Commodore Cutting, and I trust sincerely Moncrief may be spared, for a better officer or nobler man never lived," answered the lieutenant, warmly, as he went to the table drawer to search for the keys that unlocked Noel's manacles.

"Strange, I always keep them here," he muttered, thoughtfully.

"What is it?"

"I cannot find the keys to release the prisoner; they were here just before I went ashore to see you."

"Quick! go to his state-room," said the commodore, excitedly, and leaving the cabin, Alden Ainslie returned the next instant, his face as pale as death, and exclaimed:

"Commodore Cutting, Lieutenant Moncrief has escaped."

"Gone? Impossible!" said the commodore, springing to his feet.

"It is true, sir, and would that were all; but the guard who was over him lies dead by the door, having been stabbed to the heart with a keen-bladed knife."

"Great heavens! Lieutenant Ainslie, this must be looked to. Come, let us to the deck; have the men called to quarters, and if possible the fugitive must be overhauled, for it is a lasting disgrace to a man-of-war to be thus bearded."

Quickly ascending to the deck, accompanied by the commodore, Lieutenant Ainslie gave orders to call the men to quarters, and then the two descended to the gun-deck, where the form of the dead marine was found, and the rope hanging from the open port, proved the manner in which the prisoner had escaped.

"He has been aided in this; let us to the deck," and once more ascending the quarter-deck, the commodore called out:

"Who is officer of the deck?"

"I am, commodore; Mr. Bennett took my place when I went into the cabin with you," answered Lieutenant Ainslie.

"Mr. Bennett, have you seen aught going on, that is a clew to this escape of the prisoner?"

"No, commodore; yonder schooner-yacht passed us shortly after you went below, giving us a wide berth," answered the officer, pointing as he spoke toward a white sail, that was flying rapidly seaward.

The eyes of all were turned toward the flying craft, and just then a loud voice hailed from an approaching skiff that came down the river:

"Ho, the brig-of-war!"

"Ahoy! what do you wish?" answered Lieutenant Ainslie.

"Will you bring yonder schooner to? for those now on board of her slew Mr. Moncrief, a short while since," came the answer.

"Ha! here is a clew. Mr. Ainslie, train a gun on the schooner, and Mr. Bennett, let fall the sails, for I will give chase if we fail to bring the yacht to," said the commodore, and he then called to the men to come alongside.

"Well, sir, now give us all the knowledge you have about this matter," said Commodore Cutting, sternly, as the occupants of the skiff, two in number, ascended to the brig's deck.

"Well, sir, we be fishermen, and was in the barge that brought Mr. Moncrief and his party down to the merrymaking, at your house to-night, and when we got to the mansion again, we started to our homes, and had gone but a little way when we heard a pistol-shot, so we ran back to where we had left Master Clarence and Miss Eve, and we saw the yacht yonder swinging away from the pier, and on her deck was two men, one in an officer's uniform, and the other a great big fellow, looking like a seaman."

"Well, sir, we ran up to where the servants was crowded in a knot, having come down from the mansion, and we saw Master Clarence lying on the ground with a sword-wound in his side, and Miss Eve was fainted and held up by the governor—"

"What is that you say, Lieutenant Ainslie?" interrupted the commodore, quickly, turning toward the young officer who was clearing a gun aft.

"I say, sir, that in the present position of the brig, no gun can be brought to bear upon the schooner, sir."

"Then, slip the cable and give chase, and with a will. Do you hear, men? Lively to your work!" cried Commodore Cutting, and he again turned to the fishermen and said, sternly: "Go on, sir, with your story."

"Yes, sir; well, you see, Jake, here, and me knew who it was—"

"Who was it?"

"I mean we knew who it was had done the deed was them as was running away in the yacht, so we went down to the shore and there we found the skiff alongside, which we knew belongs to some fishermen here in the town, so we jumped into it and gave chase after the schooner, sir, and that's all we know."

"I thank you, my men; now go back to your skiff, and if we overhaul the murderer, you shall not be forgotten for your promptness; who did you say was absent from the vessel, Mr. Bennett?"

"A seaman who hails only to the name of Stranger; he has left the brig since dark."

"Then he it was who aided Lieutenant Moncrief in his escape; and, Ainslie, sad as it appears, I fear we shall find that another crime has been perpetrated by Noel, for did you observe, the fisherman remarked that the two men who fled in the yacht were an officer and a seaman, as the moonlight plainly showed?"

"Yes, sir, I noted it."

"Well, what do you make out of it all?"

"I know not what to say; there she swings round and feels the wind. Clear those bow-guns there, and as soon as you can get range, send a ball after yonder schooner."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the commodore, your barge is still alongside."

"Commodore Cutting, a reefer, coming aft, and politely saluting his superior."

"True, I had forgotten," and stepping to the lee of the brig, he said:

"Coxswain, cast off and row back; let the ladies at home know where I am, and say I expect to return soon."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the cutter dropped rapidly astern, just as a bright glare illumined the bows of the brig, the deep voice of a gun roared angrily forth upon the still night air, and reverberated through the quiet streets of the town in many a rumbling echo.

"Stranger, the brig is in full chase; doubtless the skiff we saw astern of us has let them know who we are," said Noel Moncrief, calmly, as he stood at the

helm of the little yacht, and held her on her course with steady hand.

"Yes, sir, she is in earnest, for yonder comes a gun; but it was aimed wildly," answered the seaman, as the shot flew far to windward, and buried itself in the sea.

"They'll improve by practice, and the moonlight is in their favor."

"No, lieutenant; if the gunners of those bow-guns know it is *you* that stands on this schooner's deck, take my word for it, their shots will all fly wild, for there are few men in yonder brig but would risk their lives to save you."

"Still we must endeavor all in our power to escape; with our present breeze I believe she will bear her topsails and flying-jib."

"Ay, ay, sir," and Stranger sprung nimbly forward, and in a few moments had set the extra canvas.

The yacht was a mile below the town, and the brig, three-quarters of a mile astern, was keeping up a rapid fire upon the flying vessel, but with no other effect than to send the balls over and around her, occasionally striking near enough to throw a shower of spray upon the decks.

As Noel watched the brig, however, he saw that, though the yacht was a fast sailer, she was being steadily overhauled by her pursuer, who was now covered with canvas from her topmasts to her decks, and he felt assured that, as soon as his little craft had to stagger through the waves of the ocean, she would soon be taken.

Still his nerve did not fail, nor was there a tremor of his hand upon the tiller, as he urged his little vessel on, his eyes glancing ahead and then astern.

The yacht had now reached a part of the harbor where the channel runs to the east of Great Island, taking a circuitous route for more than a mile, and Noel was about to follow its devious course, when a shot from the brig carried away the schooner's fore-topmast, the shock causing her to shiver from stem to stern.

"That is bad for us, Stranger," said the young officer, coolly, and then he quickly added, "By Heaven, I'll risk it! Stand ready to ease off everything!" and putting the helm hard down, Noel sprung forward to let fly the main-sheet, while Stranger did the same for the foresail and jibs.

Instantly the little schooner came about, and, close-hauled, stood back in the direction of the brig-of-war.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORM-CHASE.

WONDERING at the strange maneuver of the lieutenant, Stranger was however silent, and stood ready to obey the slightest order, for he had implicit confidence in Noel's skill and courage.

On darted the schooner, until she came once more to the head of Great Island, and scarcely half a mile divided her from the brig, which had ceased firing upon noticing her put about, believing those on board of her had seen their inability to escape, and were coming back to surrender.

Commodore Cutting had just given the order to Lieutenant Ainslie to luff the brig, and her bows were sweeping gracefully around in obedience to her helm, when suddenly, there was a surprised cry forward, and all eyes were at once turned again upon the yacht.

Having discovered that, if he kept the ship-channel to the northward of Great Island, his craft would soon be overhauled, or sunk by the fire of the brig, Noel had at once determined, as his fore-topmast was shot away, to put back and attempt to run the south passage, between the main, upon which stood Portsmouth, and the island before referred to.

For this reason he had put back to gain the head of Great Island, although he well knew the channel through which he would have to pass, to reach the open sea, was, in some places, but three feet in depth.

But the yacht drew little over two feet of water, and he determined to risk it, and with such success was his attempt carried out that, as he anticipated, the brig was brought up into the wind, believing him on his way back to surrender.

The exclamation of surprise then on the Vulture, arose from seeing the schooner round the head of Great Island, ease off the sheets free, and dart away before the wind, her sails spread out wing-and-wing.

The brig having come to, it was some moments before she could be gotten under way again and all drawing, so that when she reached the head of Great Island the schooner was half-way through the shallow and intricate channel, and passing Pest Island.

"There comes the last gun she can fire at us, for some time, Stranger," said Noel, quietly, as one of the broadside guns sent a shot over the schooner, just as the brig continued on in the ship-channel.

"That was a daring and skillful move, sir," said the seaman; "you seem to know these waters well!"

"Yes, I have sailed on them from boyhood; but see, yonder are the spars of the brig above the island, and how rapidly she glides along! But we will distance her greatly by this move, for this channel is much shorter than the other; and see, we are now coming into Little Harbor, and yonder is the open sea."

On flew the schooner, the brig now far astern, and, having passed Kitt's Rock, the swell of the ocean caused her to pitch heavily, for a high sea was running.

"Lieutenant, see there," and Stranger pointed astern of them to the heavens, which were black with masses of clouds, that had suddenly arisen above the horizon and were rapidly overspreading the sky.

"That is another enemy, yet still a friend, Stran-

ger, for I can hug the shore while the brig dare not. By Heaven! see, the whole sky is overcast already."

"I can no longer see the brig, sir; shall I shorten sail?"

"No, not yet; we have now an offing of two miles, and I will put away on a southerly course. Jibe the mainsail over, and haul the fore and main sheets close aft; trim all close and belay."

The wind was blowing a stiff seven knot breeze from the westward, and under her clouds of canvas the schooner staggered and plunged heavily; but, anxious to place as great a distance as possible between himself and the brig, Noel stood on, hoping in the darkness to elude the vigilance of his pursuers.

"Stranger, lower away the flying jib, and then let fall the foresail, so that you can reef close."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and in a short while, under greatly reduced sail, the yacht held on, the wind each moment increasing.

"Here, Stranger, take the helm, while I go below, for I would know what water and stores we have aboard, that I may decide whether to put into some town on the coast, or stand right on southward."

Stranger sprang to the helm, and descending into the cabin Noel glanced around him, and then quickly examined the store-room, water-casks, and the other compartments below decks, having lighted the cabin lamp and a lantern he found on the table.

"Ho, Stranger," he called out to the seaman, in a joyous tone, "the yacht has just been stored and prepared for a cruise, for there are provisions sufficient aboard to last us a month, besides several fowling-pieces and pistols; she was evidently to start on a hunting-expedition along the coast."

"I am glad of it, sir; so much the better for us; but will you please come upon deck again?" answered the seaman, and, delighted with the discovery he had made about the yacht, Noel ascended to the deck, for the excitement of the chase kept down the poignant sorrow he otherwise would have felt, at the deed his hand had wrought only a few hours before.

One glance around the dark waters, and up at the black heavens, and he knew why the seaman had called him to the deck, for the yacht was bounding before a gale that each moment increased to fury.

"We are going to have a black time of it, sir."

"Yes; I'll take the helm, while you lower away the jib. There, now; leave her fore-topmast stay-sail, and come aft and let fall her main-sail. That will do; now reef her to her lightest reef-points, for she'll need some main-sail to bring her round, if we have to lay to."

With wonderful strength and agility, Stranger had obeyed the order given him, and then, with only a close-reefed main-sail and fore-topmast stay-sail, both stretched to their utmost tension, the yacht kept on, staggering over and through the wild waters, which were rendered blacker by the mass of clouds hovering low over the sea, and from which broke a mournful roar of thunder.

"Ha! there comes the first flash of lightning. Now keep a bright watch for the next, and we'll see what has become of the brig," said Noel, whose face was pale and brow stern, for he could not but feel that it was God's anger upon him for the deed his hand had wrought, and even the stoical seaman felt awed by the mighty power of an avenging Almighty.

Suddenly the whole sea was a broad flame of light; a vivid, forked spear of lightning pierced the dark masses of storm-clouds, darted with angry, zig-zag, fiery splendor from the heavens, and amid a crash of thunder that shook the very waters, descended oceanward until it struck the tall, tapering spars of the brig-of-war, two miles to windward of the schooner.

"God in heaven! but this is awful! Oh, what misery and despair have I brought upon my ill-fated companions!" cried Noel, momentarily releasing his hold upon the tiller.

"It is fearful, sir; but look out, or the yacht will founder," answered Stranger, as he sprung forward and seized the helm and once more held the yacht on her course.

By an effort recovering himself, Noel turned his gaze across the waters, and watched with burning eyes the flames dart along the rigging, and blend the spars and sails in fiery serpents.

"See! she has come to; and hark! they are cutting away her masts. God grant she may be saved!"

"Yes, lieutenant, I hope they will be saved, for there are many brave and noble men on yonder vessel; but we have no need to dread them now, so had we not better lay to, for the schooner is nearly drowned forward, and I fear she may run under, as the gale is increasing."

"You are right, my good friend. Here, give me the helm, and stand ready, for I'll take advantage of the next favorable wave to bring her up."

A moment more and the gallant little vessel had brought her bows into the wind, and lay upon the storm-swept waves in comparative safety, while the two men, who so bravely guided her destiny, turned their eyes fixedly upon the brig, which was now almost a mass of flames above decks.

"See! see! there shake her masts—they are gone! Look! now they cut the stays!" cried Noel, and with a loud crash and hissing sound, heard even on the schooner, the entire top-hamper of the gallant brig-of-war went over the side into the sea, leaving the waters once more in impenetrable gloom.

"Behold! there goes a gun; what can they have seen us, and even a wreck as they are, be firing at us? Is man's hatred as deep as that?"

"No, lieutenant, there goes another flash; they are firing minute guns of distress, to call for aid from the town."

"True; you are right, and I hope it will be understood by the two cruisers I saw in the harbor."

"I hope so; but now, unless they are sinking, they

have little to fear, for the hull is good and will ride out the storm, when they can rig jurmasts and get back to Portsmouth."

"Yes; but, Stranger, they come down upon us rapidly; what say you, shall we get sail on the schooner and again stand on out of the brig's way?"

"No, sir; for the canvas would be blown to ribbons in a second. She will pass near, but not over us, and perhaps not see us as we lay low in the water," answered the seaman.

"You are right; she will pass to leeward of us, and I will hail and see if they need aid, for, if my life must answer for it, I will not see my shipmates perish while I have a sound deck beneath my feet."

"Mr. Moncrief, your heart is in the right place, sir; I will stand ready to obey your orders, even if in saving them we put our own necks in the hangman's noose," answered the brave sailor, with firmness.

The brig could now be distinguished by the flash of her signal guns, to be but a few cables' length distant, rolling and pitching heavily in the sea, and coming down toward the schooner only a short distance to leeward.

Grasping firmly by the mainstays, Noel awaited until the wreck came near, and just as the roar of another gun died away, hailed in a loud, ringing voice:

"Ho! the brig, ahoy!"

No answer came for a moment, and then in the voice of Lieutenant Ainslie was the reply:

"Ahoy! who hails, and where away?"

"The chase; off your windward bow. Do you wish aid?"

A murmur of voices could be heard for an instant, and then Lieutenant Ainslie cried:

"We were struck by lightning; our masts are cut away, and we are leaking badly."

"My vessel is large enough to hold your crew; I'll hang off your quarter in case of need."

A moment there was silence, and as the brig was driving by, Noel said:

"She must bear sail, Stranger; raise the foremast-staysail."

With great difficulty the order was executed, and in a few moments the schooner was again driving before the gale, but with terrible risk, and soon overhauled the brig, when Noel again hailed:

"I will hang near you, in case of need."

"Who is that that hails?" suddenly cried the stentorian voice of Commodore Cutting.

"Noel Moncrief," boldly answered the young officer, and his words brought a ringing cheer from the crew of the brig.

"I knew it! No, Mr. Moncrief, we are in no immediate danger; our pumps will keep us afloat, and we can soon rig jurmasts."

"No, sir, if we could not take you by fair means we will not by foul; so stand on your course, young man, and if life is dear to you, keep clear of the United States."

A perfect yell of joy came from the seamen of the brig, all of whom sympathized with Noel, and admired his courage and the noble offer he had but just made to serve them, and again the commodore cried:

"Moncrief, it was noble of you to desire to serve us, and we thank you for it."

Again the clear and manly tones of Noel Moncrief were heard, and all remained silent to hear him, for the schooner was forging ahead, as he hailed:

"Commodore Cutting, I thank you for your kindness. One and all, shipmates, farewell."

Three cheers were given by the brig's crew, even the officers joining in, and the gale somewhat abating, the mainsail of the schooner was raised, and at sunrise, as the Vulture, having rigged temporary masts, headed back toward Portsmouth, the little yacht, with its daring commander, was far to the southward, a mere speck upon the restless waters.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BUCCANEER BARGE.

ONE pleasant afternoon, some two months after the escape of the yacht, Dart, from Portsmouth harbor, a small, sharp-bowed craft, with two slender masts rigged with lateen sails, was sailing quietly along the shores of Cuba, for the scene of my story now changes, kind reader, from the rock-bound coast of the North to the waters of the sunny South.

The *carrera*, for such is the name given to craft of the kind mentioned above, appeared not to be, as are many of her class in the Indies, a swift sailer, for though she had all sail spread to catch the four-knot breeze that was blowing, she was not making anything more out of it than would many a vessel of even a less fair build.

At any rate, the *carrera* was a comfortable little craft of perhaps ten tons, and her deck cleanly kept and in perfect order, while her cabin was large, roomy, and almost luxuriously furnished, which at once discovered her to belong to some coast planter of wealth, and used by him as a pleasant means of conveyance to and from his estates, when his business called him to Havana or Matanzas.

Upon the deck of the *carrera* were visible nine persons, one of whom was a tall, stalwart man, dressed in white duck, and who appeared to be the commander, for he held the helm, and every now and then gave some order to four negroes forward, who formed the crew.

The helmsman was not a negro, though his face was very dark; but in his features and dark flashing eyes could be traced the blood of a descendant of that ancient tribe of Indians, the Escurians, who were the original possessors of the island which it has cost Spain so many human lives to hold.

Amidships stood two other persons, a young man

and a young girl, both showing in their faces the admixture of the white with the African race, and their appearance indicating that they held the responsible positions of *valet* and *femme-de-chambre* to an old gentleman and a maiden who were seated aft, upon a low settee, apparently enjoying the beauty of the evening and the scenery along the coast, for the *carrera* was hardly a mile from the curving shores.

The old gentleman referred to was a person of striking appearance, for his face was darkly bronzed, his eyes intensely black and brilliant, while his mustache and curling hair were snow-white.

Dressed in a suit of white linen, with a broad *sombrero* upon his head, Don Octavio Guido looked exactly what he was, a wealthy planter of Cuba, and one who, in his earlier years, evidently had seen military service in the field.

The maiden by his side, the Donna Violeta, was one of those dark types of beautiful women, peculiarly Spanish in face and form.

Her every motion was graceful, and her figure slight, molded with marvelous symmetry, and rather above the prescribed height for a perfect form, but still it appeared faultless in the close-fitting bodice and skirt of dark-gray cloth.

The eyes were slumbering wells of fire, only needing a spark of love or anger to cause them to flash forth passion or brilliant flames; the face was in repose beautiful and Madonna-like, but as now and then it would light up as some pretty scene opened to her view shoreward, it was full of animation and sparkling loveliness; a face olive in hue, tinted with the rich blood of health, perfect in mold, and strangely fascinating to one upon whom it was turned with kindness.

Upon her head, besides the rich dark veil that drooped upon her shapely shoulders, Senorita Violeta wore a broad sun-hat, that cast in shadow and half hid the braids of black hair, drawn back from the forehead and fastened in a circling mass with a gold comb.

So intently were all on board the craft engaged in watching the landscape panorama, as they glided along, that they failed to observe a *drogher*, a kind of freight vessel used to carry coffee and sugar from the plantations to the city, that had suddenly come out of a lagoon, half hidden by the forests that overhung its mouth, and was standing boldly down upon them.

The *drogher* had two stump masts, upon which were hoisted by pulleys two long yards with large triangular sails, which instead of reefing in a blow, could be lowered in an instant into the hold of the lugger, which was open, except a canvas covering stretched across and supported by a spar acting as a cross-beam.

But one man was visible upon the lugger, and he was at the helm, apparently endeavoring all he could to take advantage of the light wind to eat up to windward of the *carrera*.

For a while he was successful in his maneuver, and had nearly gained the wind of the smaller craft, when the quick eye of the helmsman of the *carrera* fell upon him, and a stern order from his lips brought all on board to their feet.

"What is it, Lalul?" asked Don Octavio, quickly. The Indian answered in Spanish:

"Yonder *drogher* means no good, coming down on us that way; trim the sails closer, and I'll edge more into the wind," and the tones of his voice were strangely soft and musical.

The order was obeyed, and for a moment all watched anxiously to see the result, for practical craft were frequent in those waters at the time this story is laid, and especially were the lagoon buccaneers dreaded as a most cruel and ferocious set.

"*Nombre de Dios*, but she gains rapidly upon us, Lalul! Suppose we square away and run before the wind!" said Don Octavio, in an anxious tone.

"I'll try, señor. Let go the halyards fore and aft!" and away the *carrera* sped before the wind, to have her example followed the moment after by the *drogher*.

"This will never do, Lalul; for see, the lugger is now on her best sailing points."

The Indian helmsman glanced quickly over his own vessel, then steadily for a while at the pursuer, and at once gave the orders to the negro crew to trim in the sheets, while he put her away upon her former course, for with the wind on her quarter the *drogher* would also have to change, and it was evident she was not gaining as rapidly before they put away as after.

"She still overhauls us, señor; but not as rapidly as before."

"No, Lalul, what do you believe that *drogher* to be?" and Don Octavio glanced anxiously toward his beautiful daughter, who, with pale face, was watching the approach of the strange vessel.

"Senor, I think the lugger is a pirate," answered the Indian, in a low tone.

"My God! I feared so. Lalul, we must not be taken," and the Cuban again glanced toward Violeta.

"No, señor, it is death anyway; so let us die with arms in our hands."

"Well said—Ha! yonder comes another sail!" and the Cuban pointed some two miles ahead, to where a small rakish-looking schooner was just rounding a point of land.

The helmsman seized a glass and gazed intently at the strange sail for a moment, and then said:

"She does not belong to these waters, but looks like an American-built vessel. If she were not so small I would believe her to be a buccaneer, also."

"Marry, mother of God, grant it be a friend! Here, one of you boys, lower our flag to half-mast and let him see we need his succor!" cried the Cuban.

"The flag of Spain soon floated at half-mast, and

all eyes were eagerly turned toward the schooner, to denote the slightest change in her course.

"Soon it came; her bow swung round quickly, and, with the wind very nearly astern, she came flying down toward the *carrera*."

The *drogher* at once also presented a scene of action, for a dozen dark forms were discovered moving upon her decks, and quickly four long and heavy sweeps were put out, to endeavor to overhaul the chase ere the schooner got to her.

With intense excitement all on board the *carrera* watched the flight of their own vessel, which, pressed to her utmost speed, was only making about five knots, and then turned their eyes upon the rapid approach of the lugger, still nearly a mile astern, but coming with increased speed. Again they glanced ahead, toward the schooner, which, with a wall of foam about her sharp bows, was rushing toward them.

"Senor, that *drogher* is one of the fastest of her class; but, swift as she is, yonder schooner is a far better sailer," and Lalul handed the glass to Don Octavio, who, placing it to his eye, turned it toward the little vessel that had so nobly answered their sign of distress.

"Lalul, she carries but one gun that I can see—a small brass piece upon her fore-castle, and I can only observe some dozen men upon her decks."

"Enough, with our aid, to beat off fifty of the *drogher's* crew. Shall I luff closer, so as to speak him?"

"Yes, Lalul. Violeta, see how swiftly yonder schooner comes on—oh, see, yonder goes her flag—she is an American!"

"Yes, father; I have watched her rapid approach, and, though most anxious, have not failed to note her grace and speed. See, the schooner is altering her course and will come near us."

A few moments more and with her sharp prow cutting the water and dashing showers of spray upon either side, the schooner had come within a cable's length, and was so heading as to pass within a few fathoms of Don Guido's craft.

Suddenly a manly form sprang into the schooner's main-rigging, and a clear voice hailed:

"Ho, the *carrera*!"

"Ahoj the schooner!" answered Lalul.

"Is yonder *drogher* in chase of you?"

"Ay, it is a lagoon pirate."

"All right. I have not men enough to board him, but will give him a lesson. In the meantime, stand on as you are, and I will protect you all in my power."

"I thank you, sir," and ere the don could say more, the schooner had passed by and was rushing on toward the *drogher*.

"A daring fellow that, and indeed a generous one to throw himself between us and danger; but it is just like those Americans, reckless and noble-hearted to a fault," said the don, with enthusiasm.

"What a splendid looking man he was, father, and his Spanish was perfect, and his voice clear and ringing," said Violeta, still gazing after the receding schooner.

"I'll warrant your eyes could soon discover his fine form and face, and your ears drink in the melody of his voice, for ever is it thus with women."

Violeta blushed, but made no reply, and her father turned toward Lalul to address him, when, across the waters, came in distinct tones, in Spanish:

"The *drogher*, ahoy! Put back or I will fire into you!"

A derisive cheer was the only answer, and the next instant there came a puff of smoke from the bows of the schooner, and the roar of a six-pounder floated over the waters, followed by a crash of timbers and yells and groans of pain and fury coming from on board the *drogher*.

"Ha, ha! the buccaneer has met his match, if it is only a little schooner, one-fourth his size. See, see! there goes another shot, and while the *drogher* comes up into the wind the schooner is changing her course and wearing round," exclaimed Don Octavio, who, with Violeta, Lalul and the others, earnestly watched the movements of the brave little vessel.

After firing a second gun, which did considerable damage, as had the first shot, on board the *drogher*, the brave little schooner wore round, hauled her sheets in board and stood away in the wake of the *carrera*.

Rapidly the little schooner overhauled the *carrera*, and keeping in her wake and a point closer to windward, threatened to shave her as she passed by, and the Cuban planter and Lalul watched his strange movements, for they knew not yet what was the intention of the American.

Nearer and nearer the schooner approached, and, just as her sharp bowsprit hovered over the stern of the *carrera*, she fell off quickly, and, passing to leeward, her commander cried:

"Spring aboard there, men, and hold the two vessels firm together," and the next instant a young man, clad in a light, blue flannel suit and with a naval cap, sprang upon the *carrera's* deck.

It was Noel Moncrief.

CHAPTER IX. THE LAGOON PIRATES.

"LASH firm, men! Keep her off a little, helmsman, so that the two will sail more evenly," cried Noel, and then, raising his cap, politely, he turned toward Don Octavio, who, with Lalul and Violeta, had greatly admired the bold and skillful manner in which the young officer had laid his vessel alongside their own.

"Pardon me, señor, and you, señorita, for boarding you in such an unceremonious manner, but yonder *drogher* is only temporarily crippled, and will soon follow, so I offer you the service of my schooner to escape him."

"I thank you, Senor Americano, from my heart I

thank you, for my daughter and myself, for even now would we have been in his power had it not been for your timely aid and daring."

"Senor, this is no time for thanks, but for action; I have simply one six-pounder brass gun, and I observed the crew of the *drogher* engaged in getting a cannon out of the hold, to mount upon her fore-castle, and again give chase, so I urge you to at once go aboard the schooner."

"And what will become of my *carrera*?"

"Remove all you can aboard my vessel, for I have room for your crew as well as yourselves, and if you do not care to have your craft fall into the hands of the buccaneers, set her on fire."

"Senor, I hesitate, not for the loss of my vessel, but for the trouble we will give you."

"Do not mention it, sir. I am bound to Havana, and will take you there, if that was your destination."

"It is gladly I accept your kind offer, for I see the *drogher* is getting under way again;" and turning to his helmsman he bade him get the baggage, and what other things they could, quickly on board the schooner.

In a very short while the crew of the *carrera*, aided by half a dozen seamen from the schooner, had transferred the baggage, and a few other things from the cabin and hold of the Cuban craft to the American, and Noel, with a polite salute to Violeta, offered his hand and conducted her into his own sumptuously-furnished saloon, saying:

"Here, lady, I trust you will make yourself as much at home as though this were your own vessel; your maid shall join you, and your father will be near you."

"Senor Americano, I owe you more than my life; but not now can I thank you, as your vessel needs your services, for I feel that even now we are in danger."

"True, lady; to say otherwise would be false; but I have faith in my little schooner's speed, and we may get out of range ere the gun is mounted upon the *drogher*. If I can in any way serve you, command me."

So saying, Noel left the cabin, and ascending to the deck found all in readiness to cast off.

"Have you set the *carrera* on fire?"

"Yes, señor, it is burning in the hold, and the flames will soon break forth," answered Lalul, sadly, as if sorrowful to destroy his vessel.

"Then cut loose the lashings. Quick about it, men! Steady, helmsman; there, she forges ahead," and the next instant the schooner moved forward, and, free from the other craft, bent bravely to the breeze, which was now blowing quite brisk.

"Stranger, help the crew of the Cuban craft to store away their luggage, and let the baggage of the don and señorita be taken into the cabin," and walking aft, Noel relieved the seaman from the helm and took the tiller himself.

"Ay, ay, sir; and about the crew of the *carrera*?"

"We would be glad to serve, if you would assign us to duty, señor," said Lalul, politely.

"All right, my men. You, señor, can divide the watches between my mate and myself, for I see you are a thorough seaman."

"Thanks, señor, and I will now relieve you of the helm," and Lalul stepped forward and Noel relinquished his place to him; while he walked toward the don and Violeta, who just then came up from the cabin.

"The *drogher* is in full chase, I see, señor."

"Yes, sir, and the pirates are hastening to mount their gun, which I believe is a long eighteen, as well as I can make out with my glass; but, we have a mile start now, and as soon as the deck is clear of luggage, I intend to crowd on all the sail the schooner will carry," answered Noel, pleasantly, and turning suddenly he beheld Violeta. Instead of looking upon the burning *carrera*, which, now half a mile astern, was enveloped in flames, she was gazing intently into his face.

Their eyes met, and the maiden hid her earnest gaze beneath the heavily-fringed lids, while her face flushed brightly; but over the features of Noel Moncrief stole a look of inexpressible sadness, for the beautiful maiden brought vividly to his mind one most dear to him, and whom his own act had lost to him forever.

"Senor, we are gaining upon the *drogher*," said Lalul, turning to the young American, and also discovering it, the Cuban planter remarked:

"I have great faith in your little craft, captain—captain—but I have not heard your name, señor."

"Can I see you a moment, sir?" suddenly asked Stranger, with a look of anxiety upon his face.

"In one moment, good Stranger—my name, don, is—"

"It is most urgent, sir," said Stranger, again intruding, and seeing the expression upon his face Noel stepped quickly forward, and the seaman said, in a low tone:

"Pardon me for seeming rudeness, sir, but I feared you were going to give your own name to the don."

"In truth was I, Stranger."

"Well, sir, we are bound to Havana, if we escape the buccaneer, and though the schooner is so altered as not to be recognized, still it would destroy all to go into port under your own name, as there may be some American vessel of war there."

"Ever thoughtful, my good Stranger—"

"Mr. Moncrief, I am no longer a stranger to you now, so I'll tell you frankly my name. It is Westley North."

"Two more, such as *Easter Southey*, for instance, and you would have gotten around the compass; but, joking aside, I'll remember that your name is West hereafter, and mine is—is—a strange feeling urges me to it, and I will do it—my name is—*Clarence Noel*."

The seaman started as he heard the name, but only rejoined:

"You are a planter of wealth, living on the Mississippi river, and being fond of the sea this is your pleasure yacht."

"The very thing, West; now I will return to the don," and then he continued in a loud tone:

"Mr. West, run up the flying-jib, and set the top-sails, for we must get away from that fellow."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and to the call of the seaman, now known as West, the crew of the *carrera* as well as the men belonging to the schooner, sprang nimbly to obey the order.

Joining the Cubans again, the don remarked: "I was about to say, captain, as your mate called you away, that I am Don Octavio Guido, a planter of Cuba, and this is my daughter, the *Señorita Violeta*."

Noel bowed at the introduction, while the maiden held forth her little hand and said, frankly:

"I trust, senior captain, we will be the warmest friends from this day, for we owe much to you; but, do you know you have not yet made known to us your name, *Señor Americano*?" added *Violeta*, with an arch smile.

"I am called Clarence Noel, and, like your father, I am a planter. I live on the Mississippi river," and, as Noel spoke, every particle of color fled from his handsome face, leaving it as pale as death.

"We thought you were an American of wealth, senior, who amused himself with his yacht," said the don.

"Yes, I am devoted to the sea; but look! the buccaneer is striving hard to take us, and is now going to treat us to a few shots, for I notice the gun is mounted, and they are loading it."

"Lady, will you retire to the cabin, for there is danger here?"

"No, Captain Noel, I will remain and share alike with my father and yourself the danger that threatens," said *Violeta*, firmly.

"Senior, let her fall off a little—steady as you are—now she runs rapidly—ha, there we have it!" and as the young commander ceased speaking the boom of the gun was heard, and the roar of an eighteen-pound solid shot above their heads caused an involuntary dodging amid the crew.

"Let them fire away, for each shot but checks their speed, and ere long we will be out of range," quietly remarked Noel, and he placed himself, as if by accident, between the maiden and the danger that threatened her fair form.

Again came the roar of the long eighteen from the fore-castle of the *drogher*, and once more the shot flew above the schooner, and sunk into the sea a few cables' length ahead.

"*Señorita*, there is danger here for you; his practice may give him better aim," said the American, again turning anxiously toward the Cuban maiden.

"Senior, I will not hide from the death that threatens both you and my father," proudly answered the maiden, and with a glance of admiration at her true courage, Noel turned once more to watch the movements of the *drogher*.

"Ha! there comes another shot! By heaven! how unfortunate! Forward there, West, and repair the damage!" cried the American, as he saw the last shot from the *drogher* pass closely over their heads and cut away the bowsprit close to the bows.

Thus damaged the schooner became unmanageable, and Noel was about to give orders to ease off the sheets fore and aft, and put her dead before the wind, when she suddenly broached to, and lay motionless upon the water.

All on board the schooner at once realized their danger, and a loud cheer from the *drogher* showed them that the pirates were now confident of success; but, undismayed, the young American sprang forward, and with the aid of West and the crew, for one and all worked with a will, a stout spar was soon rigged and run out to act as a bowsprit, the jibs were again hoisted, and once more taking the helm the little schooner felt the wind, her sails filled, and again her sharp prow cut through the waves, and just in time, for the *drogher* was but a hundred yards astern, and her crew, gathered on the fore-castle, seemed confident of success.

Seeing that the schooner had renewed her flight, the pirates uttered a cry of rage, and distinctly was the cry of the *drogher's* commander heard to once more fire upon the flying craft.

"After the next shot, senior, I will put her before the wind, and we may yet stand a chance to outwit the buccaneer, for you see he is now almost dead to windward of us and will have to follow suit if he gives chase, and in that case you will observe the high bow of the lugger will keep them from aiming the gun at us," said Noel, who, at a glance, had taken in this advantage.

"You speak truly, senior captain; my daughter and myself trust you most fully—ha! there comes the shot—"

"And, by heaven! there goes his gun! for, see, it has dismounted itself and gone down into the hold!" cried Noel, in an exultant tone.

All on board the schooner glanced at the *drogher* and saw that Noel had spoken truly, for the cannon, hastily and rudely mounted, had rebounded from an overcharge of powder, and had fallen to the deck below with a mighty crash, that threatened to break through the stout hull of the vessel.

"Now I believe we are safe, if we can only get out of range before they remount the gun." West.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Go down into the cabin and bring me that long rifle suspended over the companionway-brackets."

"Ay, ay, captain," answered the seaman, and disappearing in the cabin he soon returned bringing with him one of those long rifles, with octagonal

barrels, small bores and carved stocks, that have become so famous upon our Western frontier.

Again releasing the helm to Lalul, and bidding him keep the schooner steady, Noel coolly loaded the rifle, and then facing the *drogher* suddenly, his quick eye ran along the barrel, and then followed the flash and sharp report, while a dark-visaged man standing upon the bow of the lugger was seen to throw up his arms wildly into the air and fall backward to the deck.

A cheer came from the crew of the schooner, and was answered by a howl from the buccaneers, one of whom began hastily to descend from the foremast, where he was at work out on the long spar of the fore-sail, where some of the lashings had been cut off by the schooner's shots.

As quick as were his movements, Noel was quicker, and, having reloaded the rifle, it was again leveled, and with a loud shriek, clutching at the air, the pirate fell into the sea and sunk beneath the waves, while his comrades hastily sought refuge from the deadly aim by hiding themselves in the hold and behind the stump masts.

But again the rifle pealed forth, and once more a pirate fell beneath the unerring aim; while a cheer of triumph burst from the deck of the schooner.

"Don Octavio, I believe we are all safe, for my rifle has taught them caution, and ere they can mount their gun again we will be out of range. Here, West, put this back in the cabin," and Noel handed the weapon to his mate.

Soon it was evident to all that there was no more danger to be apprehended from the lugger, as, with all of her canvas spread, the schooner rapidly left her far astern, and by nightfall the *drogher* appeared only as a mere speck upon the ocean.

The following morning the fair *Violeta* and her father awakened to find the schooner riding at anchor in the harbor of Havana, and, indeed, were the two Cubans most anxious to return in some way the kindness of their preserver, who, with a strange moroseness, little like his frank and kind manner of the day before, refused all offers of hospitality or reciprocity from those whom his courage and skill had saved.

Hurt by his persistent refusal to become their guest, at their city mansion in Havana, and pained to in no way be allowed to prove their gratitude for the service rendered them, *Violeta* and her father at length took their leave of the young captain of the schooner, and were rowed ashore to the nearest pier, while Lalul and the crew of the *carrera* quickly followed with the baggage in another boat, which immediately returned to the yacht.

CHAPTER X.

FOLLOWING FATE.

As Don Octavio Guido was about to enter a carriage, which Lalul had called upon landing, an exclamation from *Violeta*, who was already seated upon the back seat, caused him to suddenly glance around.

"What is it, my daughter?" asked the don, who was not yet in a pleasant mood after the refusal of Noel to become his guest, or even promise to call at his mansion.

"See! see the schooner, father."

Turning quickly, Don Octavio glanced over the harbor, and, his eye falling upon the little vessel, he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and said, musingly:

"Strange, strange; I must confess I am in the dark regarding the movements of that wonderful young man."

"Father, I think I have it. Don Noel evidently was not bound to Havana in his yacht, but upon some different cruise, and only put in here to oblige us, and hence his immediate departure."

"I believe you are right, *Violeta*. Well, I trust we will meet him again, for I like not to be under such heavy obligations to any man," and, giving the direction to the coachman where to drive, the don entered the carriage and drove from the pier, while the fair *Violeta* turned many a longing glance toward the distant schooner. That her heart was deeply interested in its dashing but moody young commander was not wholly untrue, as we shall see.

The sight that had so astonished Don Octavio and the *señorita* was the sudden hasty weighing of the schooner's anchor, and the rapid manner in which she was spread with canvas, to stand swiftly down the harbor.

There was reason for this sudden movement. An American brig of war was gliding by into the harbor!

One glance upon the vessel and Noel's face became as pale as death, for though with new spars and rigging, he recognized at once the vessel that had so long been his home, and on the decks of which he had once been second in command.

"West."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What brig is that, just passing us?" and the voice of Noel was low and deep with suppressed emotion.

The seaman turned quickly, and his own face paled slightly as his eyes fell upon the vessel, while he answered, in a low tone.

"Captain Noel, it is the American brig-of-war *Vulture*."

"Yes, my good friend; she escaped being wrecked, that fearful night, and, refitted, is sent to these waters."

"Yes, sir; I see Lieutenant Ainslie upon the quarter-deck," answered West, attentively regarding the brig, though, like Noel, he kept the main boom of the schooner between himself and the view of those upon the incoming vessel-of-war.

"True, I recognize Alden Ainslie, and he is her captain—yes, and beside him stands Calvin Bernard."

"Well, I am glad that they are both benefited by my leaving, and am glad to see that the reeder did not get himself into trouble, by his kindness in being my second."

"No, sir; he seems to have been promoted, for he wears a lieutenant's uniform."

"You are right, West," said Noel, glancing at the group of officers upon the brig's deck, for the two vessels were but a short distance apart.

Slowly the American vessel-of-war glided by, and headed further up the harbor, and attentively did the two men on the schooner watch her motions until they saw her drop anchor a half-mile away.

"West."

"Sir."

"We are outcasts."

The words were spoken slowly and with deep feeling, and to them the seaman made no reply, and Noel continued:

"Yes, West, we are outcasts, and it is my hand that has brought upon you, as well as myself, the brand of exile from the land of America."

"Captain Noel, do not speak thus, sir; you nobly stood by me, sir, in my distress, and I but acted the part of a friend when the world went hard with you," said West, feelingly.

"Indeed you did, my good friend; but, West, we cannot remain here; we must at once away, and whither God only knows, for I am a hunted man."

"Yes, captain, we must away from here at once; but the world is wide and the ocean can be our home. Shall I get the schooner under way?"

"Yes, immediately," and in ten minutes more the fleet little vessel was flying down the harbor and heading for the open sea.

Having gained an offing, West called one of the crew to the wheel; and, beckoning to Noel as if he would speak to him privately, descended into the cabin, where he was followed the moment after by his commander, who had been idly watching the shores of Cuba disappear astern, and with bitter thought conning over the memories of the past that then crowded upon his heart and brain.

When the schooner fled from Portsmouth, the night of the storm, she headed on down the coast, and, with only her crew of two men, after a rapid run made the harbor of New York.

In those days the telegraph and railroad did not fly across the country, and Noel well knew he could reach New York, ship there a crew, fully store his craft, and draw funds he held there on deposit, ere the news came of his crime and flight.

He therefore boldly entered the harbor and visiting his bankers, for his father allowed him unlimited credit, drew from them a large amount of money, which they gave to him without a word, though surprised he should need such a sum.

But giving them no explanation Noel took his money, and visited a shipping merchant and at once purchased everything for a long cruise, besides being so fortunate as to secure from the ship-chandler a small six-pound brass gun, which he was anxious to possess himself of, as he knew not what might cross his path during his cruise.

Going aboard to receive his purchases, Noel then sent Stranger, now known as West, ashore to secure a crew, and by nightfall the faithful fellow returned, bringing with him a dozen good seamen, for he had been most careful to pick only those men whom he felt could be relied upon in a difficulty, and were not particular as to the service they were to enter upon.

With a few kind, but firm words, and an open, generous manner that had rendered him ever popular as an officer, Noel greeted his crew, and informed them that he was bound on a cruise of pleasure, and was destined for no particular point; but if they served him faithfully, he would never forget to look after their interests and reward them, while, if they acted otherwise, he would punish them most severely.

Predetermined to like their commander from what West had told them, the seaman received his words with a cheer, and were then quickly divided into three watches of three men each, for Noel had made West his first mate, and an intelligent-looking fellow among the crew his second officer, while the two remaining men served in the capacity of stewards, for which position they seemed most fitted.

It was a busy night aboard the little schooner, but toward daylight all arrangements for her cruise had been completed, and she immediately got under weigh and stood down the harbor.

By sunrise she passed through the Narrows, and three hours after rounded the low point known as Sandy Hook, and immediately stood away to the southward, Noel recklessly indifferent where he would go.

But as the days and weeks rolled by, the young commander gained more regard for life, appeared to take greater interest in the cruise, and with considerable spirit, and a quiet enjoyment, devoted himself to the duties devolving upon him, to the great delight of his faithful mate, who had feared at one time that it was the intention of Noel to return to Portsmouth and deliver himself up for trial.

Yet, though Noel had at first brooded sadly over the misfortunes that had overtaken him, and longed to end his miserable career, he soon banished from him such thought, and to all outward appearance became cheerful and contented with his hard lot, though at heart he deeply felt the bitter misery that had dogged his footsteps since his duel with his commander.

West was delighted at this change in his young captain, and suggested, for a motive that will eventually appear in this narrative, that the yacht should be put away for the coast of Cuba, and, willing to humor his faithful friend, Noel gave the order, and before a fair breeze the fleet little vessel soon ran

down into the waters of the Gulf, and was steadily sailing along the coast of that "beautiful isle of the sea," when from her decks the *carrera* was discovered, flying with all haste from the clutches of the buccaneer drogher.

CHAPTER XI. THE MATE'S STORY.

FOLLOWING West into the cabin, for the manner of the mate proved to his commander he had something important to communicate, Noel took a seat and quietly lit a cigar, while he motioned to his officer to follow his example.

"I will not smoke, thank you, captain, for I would use my tongue, as I have much to tell you. We are now drifting like an oarless barge upon the ocean, having no aim for the future, no destined port in which to drop our exiled anchor."

"You speak truly, West. I am, as it were, a waif, going wherever the wind listeth," answered Noel, sadly.

"And this should not be, sir, for with your will and courage as an officer, you should not be an unknown wanderer."

"It were better thus, my good West, for my hand is doubly-dyed with blood, and nowhere have I a haven of rest; but your manner indicates that you have something of importance to say."

"Have, captain," impressively answered the mate, and pouring, from a decanter, a half-glassful of brandy he drank it down, and then, drawing nearer to his commander, said, in a low tone:

"Captain Noel, I am now about to make known to you the story of my life, one of strange adventure, and you will then be able to discover why I asked you so earnestly to cruise in these waters."

"I am, as you see, and as many others have seen, a deformed man, a hideous caricature of the image of my Creator, but within my heart there is no deformity, though God only knows why it is not warped into a shapeless mass of corruption."

"My name, as I told you, is Westley North, and my father was an American who fought bravely through the war of '76 and then went to Mexico, where his wealth and influence soon gained for him a prominent position."

"In Mexico he married, so it was believed, the daughter of a wealthy Mexican *grande*, and I am the result of that union, and my deformity was a curse upon my father for having ignobly deceived the trusting Mexican maiden who became his *supposed* wife; I say *supposed*, for it was not known then that my father, while a student at Oxford College, England, had secretly married a young girl, the daughter of a poor farmer."

"That poor girl he had cruelly deserted, and returning to America had believed his crime of desertion would never be known."

"But, 'Man proposes and God disposes,' and thus my cruel father returned to his elegant *hacienda* one night to find there in close conversation with my mother, the wife whom he had so cruelly deserted in England."

"At the sight of my father, my mother, who had just heard the story of the wrong done her, stretched forth her hands and fell fainting to the floor and lay there like one dead, while near her stood the English woman and the man who had so deceived both of them."

"Well, woman, what do you here?" asked my father, sternly.

"I come to claim my husband—or his gold," answered the woman, quietly.

"My parent glanced one moment into the face before him, and read there the wreck his deed had wrought, for all the beauty and refinement were gone, leaving behind only a look of despair, dissipation and sordid gain, for upon her desertion by her husband the woman, driven by despair and persecution, had become hardened into the desperate adventures."

"Your husband, or his gold?" said my father, sneeringly, repeating her words.

"Yes, Westley North; but I prefer the gold, and gold I will have."

"One moment my father stood in silence, his eyes alternately falling upon the unconscious form of my mother and then turning upon his wife; then he said, slowly:

"If gold is your object, you shall have it; but upon one condition."

"Name it."

"That you await her return to consciousness and then tell her what you have said is a lie—that, formerly, you knew me well, in fact stood in a very close relationship to me, but that we were in no way legally bound to each other, and desiring to obtain from me money you determined to claim me as your husband. Will you do this, Ellen? and as my father spoke he gazed anxiously into the face of his wife."

"Upon one condition, Westley North."

"And that condition is—"

"That you give me one hundred thousand dollars."

"One hundred thousand dollars! Woman, I would pay a Mexican to have you murdered first," cried my enraged father.

"And the murder would out. Do you suppose I have not anticipated your worst and provided for it? My murder would hang you up to your own trees in less than twenty-four hours," triumphantly replied the woman."

"Ellen, you have the advantage. I will give you the money, but, so help me, God! if ever you cross my path again you shall die."

"So be it; give me the money."

"I have not one-tenth part of that sum by me, so meet me at my office, in the city of Mexico, to-morrow at noon, and I will pay it to you; but you must at once leave this country."

"I will trust you, Westley North, for you dare not disobey. Now to restore to consciousness this poor, wronged woman."

"My mother came to life again, and, dearly loving my father, willingly believed the story of the woman, especially when she told it with her own lips."

The mate paused, his face pale as death, and with a frank manner of sympathy and friendship Noel held forth his hand and grasped that of the man before him, saying, quietly:

"My dear friend, from my heart I feel for you."

The mate made no reply immediately, but again poured out a glass of brandy and dashed it off, after which he continued, in the same low and musical tones he had before spoken:

"Yes, the lie was believed, and again my mother was happy, and my father seemingly so, for having paid into the hands of Ellen North the money demanded by her, he had seen her depart for Vera Cruz, from whence she had given it as her intention to sail for England."

"But, let me hasten on, captain."

"I, the only offspring of this ill-starred union, grew to manhood petted, humored and loved, even though I was deformed."

"And through my years of boyhood I loved my father, the man who had cast such a stain upon my birth."

"Yes, I loved him, until one night, as we were returning together from a hunt, he suddenly fell from his horse, shot down by some unseen foe."

"Nearly wild with grief, I raised him in my arms and bore him to a cabin, which I remembered stood near, and roused the inmate, a strange, wild-looking woman whom I had often seen before, and wondered at her light hair and blue eyes, in strange contrast with the people of Mexico."

"The woman met me at the door, and said quietly, as she observed the form in my arms:

"Is he dead?"

"No, but I fear he will die," I answered, struck with her strange manner."

"Yes, he will die; I intended he should when I fired the shot."

"One look of horror I turned upon her, and then wrought up to madness by her words, I sprang toward her, but waving me back, she cried:

'Hold! would you learn the wrong done me, and you and one other, by that man? Listen.'

"Struck by her words I hesitated, and then she told me, in words that burned my brain and seared my heart, all that I have made known to you."

"I turned to the prostrate form of my father, and beheld his dying eyes fixed upon me."

"Speak, sir; has she told the truth, for you have heard all," I asked, in a hoarse whisper."

"She has—forgive me, my—" he could say no more, for his eyes closed in death."

"Determined not to bring misery upon my poor mother's head I told her not the story, but gave her to understand my father had been shot down by brigands."

"Poor woman; the shock broke her heart, and a few months after she died, ignorant of the great wrong done her."

"Cursing my bitter fate, I would not touch the gold left me by my father, but dividing it between the government and the church, and thereby winning a distinguished name for piety and patriotism, I left my native land, and became a wanderer throughout the world."

"Embittered by the remembrance of what I was, I was reckless of honor and life, and in the end consorted with the buccaneers of the Caribbean Sea, to eventually leave them, and with a strange fatality became a seaman in the naval service of the United States."

"West, you have indeed had a wonderful life," said Noel, who had listened throughout to the recital with the deepest attention."

"Yes, sir, a life heaped with curses; but, captain, I have not told you of my past, either to interest you in me, or for *bravado*, but for a purpose."

"And that purpose is—"

"You shall hear, sir. You know at present that there is trouble in Mexico, for the entrance of the French into Spain has terminated Spanish power in my native land and brought on a war."

"Yes."

"Well, my influence, for it is not known that I am an illegitimate son, is considerable in Mexico, caused, not only by the high position held there by the family of my mother, the former influence of my accursed father, but through my own act in giving to the church and State my vast wealth."

"In this war the clergy of Mexico are taking an important stand, and hence will willingly use their influence in my behalf, and my proposition is to at once put the schooner away for Vera Cruz, where I have information that there are several swift-sailing vessels being built, to be commissioned by the present government as cruisers against the French and Spanish, and all who oppose the new party."

"Go on, West; I am listening."

"Ay, ay, sir. Well, by going to Vera Cruz I can soon obtain for you a commission in the Mexican service, and the command of one of those fleet cruisers."

"West, my noble fellow, I thank you; but is it fair that I should deprive you of this honor, for by education and experience you are in every way fitted for it."

"I may be fitted for it, captain, but I am too sensitive of my hideous form ever to rig it up in the uniform of an officer. Why, it is like dressing up a corpse in marriage garments. No, sir, I follow you, and no other man."

"We will go to Vera Cruz, get the vessel and free commission, which, by the way, from Mexico makes us little better than buccaneers, and then, sailing for

an island in the Caribbean, I will man the craft with a crew, as reckless, as daring, as ever trod a deck, for by visiting my old cruising-ground, I can rally around me a set of fellows who will be most willing to take their necks out of the hangman's noose, by shipping as seamen on board a vessel-of-war, even though she flies Mexican colors."

"West, I must confess I had decided upon no plan for the future, and you shall have your way; so go on deck and put the schooner away for Vera Cruz," said Noel, thoughtfully, and with a bright smile upon his face, the mate arose, thanked his commander, and soon gave the necessary orders to the helmsman, and away the fleet vessel flew toward the shores of Mexico."

CHAPTER XII. THE NEW CRUISER.

TOWARD the close of one of those balmy, hazy evenings, so common in southern latitudes, and a month or so after the day upon which the exiled yacht was put away for Vera Cruz—the City of the True Cross, and also, as it is figuratively called upon account of its strength, the "Iron Gate of Mexico"—a schooner of three hundred tons was running briskly along over the bright waters of the Gulf of Mexico, and with fore and main-sail jibed to port and starboard, she was making eight knots wing and wing before the wind, and shoving a wall of foam from either bow."

The schooner had a decided look of mischief about her, for the hull was low in the water, of great length, and considerable breadth of beam amidships, which, with the very heavy sails she carried, spreading canvas enough for a vessel twice her size, made it evident she was built for the purpose of great speed."

Excepting the bright new sails, and a crimson belt running around her hull, everything about her was as black as night, presenting the appearance of a vessel intended for hard sea service."

Along the high and strong bulwarks, of sufficient height to hide the upright form of a man, there appeared no sign of ports, though a glance on her decks showed that she carried four long eighteens to a side, while two thirty-two-pounder pivots were advantageously mounted fore and aft, to be used as bow and stern chasers, and also as a broadside."

Every line and spar was in place, every rope neatly coiled, and her decks in perfect order, though strangely devoid of the number of men that would have been looked for aboard a vessel of her armament, for but a dozen seamen were visible, including two who held the wheel."

Another strange circumstance about the schooner was that upon each sail was worked, in red silk, a large pair of wings, presenting a striking appearance relieved against the white canvas, and of sufficient size to be seen at the distance of miles; also, upon either bow, was painted a red wing, instead of a figure-head."

Upon the quarter-deck stood two officers, who, though dressed in the gorgeous uniform of the Mexican navy, the reader will at once recognize as Noel and West, for their visit to Santa Cruz had been most successful; a swift sailing vessel had been purchased out of his own means, by the young American, after he had disposed of his own yacht, and he had found that West had not exaggerated his influence with his government, for the commission of a free rover, under the flag of Mexico, had been readily granted."

With great care Noel had attended to the armament and fitting out of his vessel, which he manned only with the crew of the yacht, for it was his intention to further follow the advice of West, and run to the haunt of the Caribbean pirates for the requisite number of men for the schooner, well knowing that they would prove a daring and determined set, for his former experience in fighting them had shown him both their prowess and courage."

With the bitterness of his crime ranking at his heart, and feeling himself an exile, a fugitive flying from justice, he had named the schooner the Red Wing, and had the strange but appropriate device worked upon her sails and painted upon her bows."

After running wing-and-wing down the Gulf for some hours, the schooner's course was changed, so as to bring the wind abeam; the foresail was jibed to leeward, the sheets drawn flat aft; and, close-hauled upon the wind, the graceful vessel bent bravely to the influence of the stiff breeze."

"She sails like a witch, West; let us try her with more sail," said Noel, gazing with pride upon his beautiful vessel. In obedience to orders there arose from the deck a fluttering mass of canvas to the fore and main-topmasts, and settling into place were two huge gaff-topmasts, which greatly added to the speed of the schooner."

"Upon the deck of this fleet craft I fear no vessel afloat, West," said Noel, after watching for a while the action of the Red Wing under the heavy pressure and noting her increased speed."

"Ay, captain; we can show our heels to all Americans, and easily run away from any Spaniard we cannot whip."

The wind favoring, noon of the following day saw the beautiful schooner standing majestically into a miniature bay that indented the shores of a small island of the West Indies."

West had the helm, and skillfully guided the cruiser through the dangerous channel, while at his side stood Noel, his brow dark and gloomy, for memory would haunt him, and he could not but remember the circumstances of his former visit to that island, when in the boats of the Vulture he had boldly attacked the pirates in their stronghold and broken up, as he had believed, their haunt."

Suddenly from the foliage-clad hillside there came a puff of smoke, a roar broke the Sabbath-like still-

ness of the scene, and the next moment an iron ball whistled across the schooner's bow.

"They are wide awake, captain, I see; so we might as well display the private signals," said West.

Noel at once ran up to the foremast head a white flag with a scroll of parchment engraven in the center, while from the peak fluttered a large ensign of crimson, white and black.

A moment more and the same colors were displayed in the hands of two men, who stepped from their green retreat and waved them vigorously toward the schooner.

"All right, captain; now I will go ashore, taking two men in the gig with me, while you can stand off and on in this little bay. If I do not return in two hours' time, you may know I have been treacherously dealt with, and at once put to sea, and return to Vera Cruz, where you can get a crew, such as they are.

"If successful, I will soon be back and bring with me the young commander of this piratical haunt, who, if I do not misjudge him, will be only too anxious to take his head out of the hangman's coil by vailing it in the Mexican flag."

A moment more the ex-buccaneer left the schooner, and taking the helm himself, Noel, with the Red Wing under reduced sail, stood off and on to await his return.

Keeping his eye directed landward, he saw his officer run ashore, where he was met by a number of men, who appeared to greet him warmly, and watching them narrowly for a while, he observed a half-dozen of the pirates enter the gig, which at once put off for the schooner.

As the schooner put about, the gig boarded her, and Noel having relinquished the helm to Hart, his second officer, met West and the pirates at the gangway.

"Captain Muriel, this is the commander of the Red Wing," said West, as he stepped upon the schooner's deck; and at his words, there advanced toward Noel a man of hardly more than twenty-three, with a slight but firmly-knit frame, and a face which, shaded as it was by long, dark, waving hair, and no beard, was almost of feminine beauty.

Yet his compressed lips and eager, piercing eyes, denoted stern resolve and a brave spirit beneath the effeminate mien, while his easy manner, and graceful form, attired in a stylish dark uniform, made him appear as though the taint of piracy had never stained his young life.

The young Spaniard, for such was his nationality, had won a reputation as a most daring and skillful buccaneer throughout the waters of the West Indies, but other than as a bold sea-robber the name of Muriel had never been connected with an act of cruelty toward the defenseless.

"Captain Muriel, I have often heard of you, and in battle we have met; but of that time we will not now speak. You are welcome on board the Red Wing," and so saying, Noel offered his hand to the young chief.

"I thank you, sir; I have come at the suggestion of my old comrade here, and right gladly do I hear that there is a fair prospect ahead for myself and men, for we have been ashore for some time now, having had our schooner sunk in an action with the United States gun brig Vulture."

"Indeed!" said Noel, while his face flushed slightly. "Yes, sir; they caught us napping, and we had to fight it out. I lost my vessel, and with my crew fled in the boats, and the next day captured a large coffee drogher off the Cuban coast, armed it with an eighteen-pounder taken from an old dismantled fort on the lagoons, and it served to bring us here to our rendezvous."

"You chased a pleasure *carrera* off Cuba, I believe?"

"I did captain; I intended to overhaul and take her for my own use until I could get a craft to suit me better; but a plucky little American yacht drove me from my prey."

"Captain Muriel, I commanded that yacht, and I was only too happy in being able to save Don Octavio Guido and his lovely daughter."

"Don Octavio Guido! Was it his *carrera*?" suddenly asked the young Spaniard, turning deadly pale.

"Yes."

"My God! Captain Noel, in saving that *carrera* from capture you did me a favor I shall never forget," said the Spaniard, impressively, and he held forth his hand toward the American, and after a pause continued:

"The fire from the yacht injured the drogher considerably, and, in a leaky condition, I ran her here, where we have been ever since; but you have a proposal to make?"

"Yes, sir; this vessel is commissioned by the Mexican government, and is destined to cruise against Spain and France. She is as fleet as a bird, a stanch craft, and well armed and equipped as you see."

"Yet I need a crew of brave fellows to man her guns, for, as you see, and I frankly tell you, I have but a dozen men with me."

"West, here, will not accept a position as one of my chief officers, so I give him that of boatswain, which he desires, and offer to you the rank of my first lieutenant; to any man of your crew, whom you may recommend, the position of second officer, while Mr. Hart, one of my yacht's crew, will be my third."

"Under the Mexican flag you will no longer be branded as outlaws, as you are now, and I trust prize money will be plenty."

"Captain Noel, as frankly as you make the offer, so frankly do I accept your kindness for myself and crew, for circumstances, not choice, made me a buccaneer."

"In regard to a crew, I can bring you, within the

hour, a hundred brave fellows, only too willing to serve on the decks of the Red Wing."

After a conversation of half an hour more, Muriel, the newly-appointed lieutenant, went ashore to communicate his tidings to his men, and upon the following morning the beautiful schooner set sail from the island, her decks crowded with a hardy, daring crew, attired in the Mexican uniform, and ready to fight their guns to the bitter end, for one and all were at once won over by Noel's frank and manly manner toward them.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEA ROVER'S GIFT.

FROM her sailing out of the bay of the Corsair Island, the Red Wing commenced her career as a cruiser, and ere many months became known in the Southern seas as one of the most daring vessels that ever floated.

Constantly on the alert, and flying from sea to sea, Noel soon gained the name of an implacable foe to Spain and France, and though considered by the navies of the world as little else than a free rover, he yet won the admiration of his foes, and the respect of the English and American vessels-of-war then cruising in the Gulf of Mexico.

Entering more and more into the spirit of his life of adventure and danger, the young commander daily plotted to surprise and overwhelm his enemies, and few crafts were there that could long lead the fleet Red Wing in a chase, or that dared to meet her in an engagement at close quarters.

Who was her brave and skillful commander none knew, though there were many conjectures regarding his name and nationality, some representing him as a huge, fierce giant, an Irishman by birth, others saying that he was none other than the renowned Lafitte, while still more professed to believe he was a woman in disguise, one whom disappointed affection had driven to crime and piracy.

Many were the vessels-of-war that had been sent forth to hunt down and capture the dreaded rover, but still the daring cruiser plowed the seas, and in defiance her sharp prow would cut the very waters guarded by Spain's strongest forts, and her anchors be cleared away beneath the very guns of the Moro, those who gazed upon her lying quietly at anchor, believing her to be some graceful trading schooner, until when the shadows of night came on, some desperate act of courage would alarm the harbor, and in triumph the Red Wing would fly seaward, after having boldly entered the Havana waters in disguise and captured or scuttled the unsuspecting merchantman, who little feared danger beneath the shadows of the forts.

It was, when flying oceanward, out of the harbor of Havana, one night, and leaving behind a scene of dread and confusion, for Noel had daringly run in and fired a large powder-ship from Madrid, which had escaped him in a fog at sea, that the Red Wing headed across the Gulf with every sail that would draw.

Noel was pacing the deck, greatly elated at his last successful adventure, when his lieutenant, Muriel, advanced and asked:

"What is your course, captain?"

"Put her away for Vera Cruz, Muriel, for when in Havana I learned news that will decide me in changing my plans somewhat, but—"

"Sail ho!" suddenly broke in the look-out from the mast-head.

"Where away, my man?" was Noel's quick response.

"Dead ahead, sir; as well as I can tell in the moonlight she is a large vessel-of-war," returned the look-out.

"Ay, ay; keep a sharp eye upon her. Mr. Muriel, call the crew to quarters, and Mr. Hart, see that every sail is in readiness for use," ordered Noel, and ascending to the mast-head, glass in hand, he soon was gazing intently upon the strange sail.

After looking steadily through his night-glass for some moments he rapidly descended to the deck, and, calling to West, his boatswain, to follow him, he entered the schooner's cabin.

"Be seated, West, for I have made a discovery."

The ungainly boatswain seated himself quietly upon a velvet divan, and his commander, after a moment's pause, said, in a low tone:

"West, my good friend, when ashore in Havana I learned that hostilities had commenced between the United States and England."

"Indeed! I half suspected that war would follow the late high-handed outrages of England."

"War has followed, and I am determined I will not remain an idle spectator, but join my country's service."

"Are you mad, Captain Noel? Why, instant and ignominious death would follow," suddenly cried the boatswain.

"Did I give myself up, yes; but I do not intend that, and have now called you to the cabin to make known my plan."

"I am listening, captain."

"Well, I am now en route to Vera Cruz, to tender my resignation to the Mexican authorities, and, having done so, I will at once refit the schooner, run her to the American coast, and get my number in crew complete, for we have suffered considerably of late in men, and then under simply my flag of the Red Wing, I will cruise, as an unknown vessel, against the navy of England."

"The schooner, as you know, belongs to me; Muriel and the crew are no lovers of England, and I anticipate no resistance to my wishes; but, if I have any, I shall put it down with an iron hand."

"Here is my hand in the enterprise, captain, and gladly do I second you, and I see no obstacle in the way of perfect success."

"I knew you would second me, West, and hence I have first made known to you my intentions."

"Thank God, though our beautiful schooner has often run the gantlet of American guns, we have never returned a shot upon the flag, and once, as you remember, came very near being sunk by our non-resistance to that plucky little cruiser, which the schooner could have taken in a ten minutes' combat."

"Yes, I remember that you have nobly acted toward your country, in spite of the wrongs it has done you," answered West, in earnest tones.

"Wrongs that, mayhap, I brought on; but of that I will not speak now."

"As it is, we are looked upon as a pirate, for the Mexican flag is really no protection, as our experience with the navies of the world has shown, and we are hunted down with persistent determination wherever we are found upon the high seas."

"Branded as a corsair I may be in the future, but yet my native land shall never say I forgot my allegiance or struck a blow against her, while for America I shall hunt down her foes."

"Now to the present. When I ascended to the mast-head, I observed two instead of one sail in sight, and a close observation through my glass proved one to be a large English sloop-of-war, as well as I could make out by her rig, and she was maneuvering so as to get the wind of a brig-of-war some three miles distant from her, and that vessel was one you and I know but too well."

"Ha! the Vulture?"

"Yes; the brig-of-war was the Vulture."

"What a determined enemy she has proven to us! One would almost believe, Captain Noel, that she was sent out especially to take us, well knowing who it is that commands this schooner," said West, thoughtfully.

"No, they do not suspect, I am assured, that you and I are here; but, Ainslie is a dashing, gallant fellow, and the several other cruisers sailing under the Mexican colors having proven themselves nothing but pirates, as have the Carthaginians, and attacked American commerce, our navy consider it their duty to retaliate, and the Vulture would be only too happy to overhaul the Red Wing."

"Doubtless you are right, captain; but to the strange sail—an engagement will follow."

"Without doubt, for Aiden Ainslie and the Vulture crew will never fly from an enemy because he is their superior in guns and men. Hark!"

The deep boom of a heavy gun suddenly rolled across the waters, followed by another and another in quick succession.

In an instant Noel sprung to the deck, followed by West.

"Captain Noel, yonder two vessels are maneuvering to engage each other," said Lieutenant Muriel, as his commander stood beside him.

"Yes, there will be an action, and a desperate one."

"It seems rash for yonder brig to meet his adversary, which, if I mistake not, is an Englishman."

"Yes, rash; but the battle is not always to the strong. The brig is the American vessel-of-war, Vulture, and it is my intention, Muriel, to hang off and watch the combat; so keep the schooner in her present course."

"Ay, ay, sir," promptly answered Muriel, although astonished that his commander should wish to endanger the schooner in getting in range of a fight between two vessels-of-war.

Following the first guns, which had been fired from the Englishman, came a broadside from the Vulture, after which the two vessels, continuing to draw nearer together, poured in a hot and damaging fire upon each other.

A little more than a mile distant, the Red Wing appeared to be unnoticed by the sea-warriors, as, with a heavy spread of canvas, and her men at her guns, she bounded swiftly over the moonlit waters, heading directly toward the scene of carnage; but from the schooner's decks the flash of the battle-lanterns, the crash of timbers, the stern orders of the officers, and loud cries and cheers of the crews, mingling with the roar of the guns, were distinctly heard, and all on board the Red Wing gazed alternately upon the terrible scene, and then upon the tall and manly form of their commander, who stood with one hand resting upon the bulwarks, and his eyes firmly fixed upon the action.

All but one wondered at his strange course, but none dared to inquire why he was thus running his vessel into the lion's mouth, and in silence gazed upon him.

"Mr. Muriel, an unlucky shot from the Englishman has carried away the American's tiller-ropes, and she is getting worsted."

"Ay, ay; they are pouring it upon her hot and heavy," answered the young Spaniard; and after a moment he continued:

"See! if she does not strike soon they will sink her."

"At the guns there! Double-shot all! Aim at yonder large sloop-of-war. Ready, all—fire!"

The wild, ringing tones of the order awoke the crew of the Red Wing like magic, for they knew that their commander was terribly in earnest, and although they never had fired upon an English vessel-of-war before, they unhesitatingly obeyed, and a fierce broadside of flame shot from the schooner, and a hailstorm of iron was hurled upon the Englishman, then but half a mile distant.

"Stand ready to wear ship—ready about—forward and aft there, keep those thirty-twos playing with the broadside guns—ready, all—fire!"

The voice of Noel arose loud and clear, and his orders were obeyed with promptness by the crew, who, accustomed to scenes of carnage, were in their element when fighting their guns, and in a few mo-

ments' time the graceful and obedient schooner had delivered half a dozen broadsides from both starboard and port, and with terrible effect, for the foremast of the Englishman had been cut away, the mizen-topmast was tottering, and the bowsprit hung dangling in the water as the vessel broached to.

Completely hidden in the smoke of her guns, the schooner still bore down nearer and nearer, the crew getting their range from the orders of the man at the masthead, who gave them directions how to fire, as the topmast of the Englishman was distinctly visible to him above the smoke.

"She has come to, sir, and I think is unmanageable," cried the man from the masthead of the schooner.

"Where away, sir?" called out Noel.

"Directly off the starboard bow, sir."

"Helmsman, let her fall off—steady; aim low there at the guns—fire!"

The order was quickly obeyed, and the crashing of timbers and cries of the wounded proved that the iron messengers had found their target.

But still the roar of the British guns was heard, responded to by those from the Vulture, and then before the bows of the Red Wing loomed the massive hull of the sloop-of-war, which still nobly fought, though between two fires.

"At the guns there, double load with grape—steady as you are, helmsman—fire!"

A wall of flame, a hurdling of iron, a roar, a crash, shrieks and groans followed, a lull of an instant, and then a cry came from the Englishman:

"Cease firing; we strike!"

"Haul down your flag, and a boat from the American brig-of-war Vulture will board you!" cried Noel, in a voice that was heard by the crews of each vessel.

"Ay, ay; but what schooner is that?" came the sullen reply from the Englishman, but no answer was returned from the Red Wing, which, still enveloped in smoke, floated swiftly away before the wind, leaving the vessel she had so nobly aided to capture a prize to the Vulture, which, but for the timely aid of the schooner, would have had to strike her colors to her far more powerful adversary.

As much astonished as were the Englishmen at the strange conduct of the schooner, the officers and crew of the Vulture watched her rapid departure, floating, as it were, on the smoke of her guns, and it was some moments ere an order was given to man a cutter to go aboard the prize, for all had distinctly heard Noel's remark that a boat from the Vulture would take possession of the surrendered vessel-of-war.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER THE COMBAT.

STILL enveloped in the smoke of battle that floated away before the wind, and appearing with her low hull and tapering spars, like a specter shrouded in mist, the Red Wing flew on over the moonlit waters, leaving behind her astonishment mingled with awe at her strange course.

Spreading all the canvas that would draw, Noel paced the quarter-deck with a brow still stern, but upon which rested a look of satisfaction, for he felt that he had done his duty nobly in defense of his dear old flag. Determined to now make known his new-formed resolution to his officers, he called to Muriel to summon them to the cabin.

Soon they were assembled, and Noel said, quietly: "You are aware, gentlemen, that I am an American, and also know that war has been declared between my country and England. Hitherto this vessel has served under the colors of Mexico, and I need not remark here that those colors are little worth to us; but now, as the schooner belongs to me, I intend to put her in another service, and am bound to Vera Cruz to resign the commission I hold from Mexico."

"We are listening, captain," said Hernandez Muriel, quietly, as Noel paused for an instant.

"True—it is my intention to resign my commission, and then tender the services of myself, schooner, and such of the crew as will follow me, to the American Republic."

"Enter the service of the United States, captain?" asked Lieutenant Hart, a young American, who had been tempted by the romance of a sea life to leave a happy home in New England, and since he had strayed from the family fireside, had been a wanderer about the face of the earth.

Rejoiced at the prospect of returning home again with the *colat* of a naval officer, he was only too willing to second his commander in his intention, as he believed it to be.

"In one respect, yes, Mr. Hart," continued Noel. "We are to serve the United States, and as I know that my good friend West is with me, and you are also willing, I must now find out the wishes of Senor Muriel."

"Senor Muriel is wholly at your service, Captain Noel. You have drawn me from an evil life, and I hesitate not an instant to follow you wherever you may lead."

"My good friends, I am delighted to have your support, and I feel that the crew will be easily won over, for none of them, I believe, hold sympathy with England."

"To-night I anticipated my intention, and turned my broadsides upon an English vessel-of-war, that otherwise would have sunk, or taken the Vulture."

"That act will cause us no trouble, as in a few days we will no longer be in the service of Mexico, but cruising the ocean under a flag of our own, for though it is my intention to make war upon England, it is also my intention to cease hostilities toward France and Spain, and, while aiding America, keep in mystery who or what we are, for I will report to no Admiralty, carry no national colors, and touch at no port in the United States except under disguise."

"After leaving Vera Cruz, I intend to run to some port where I can refit the schooner, rig her in new canvas, leaving out our red wings, and, painting her white, so disguise the vessel that none of her old friends or foes will recognize her."

"Your old piratical haunt, Muriel, I will make our rendezvous, and also I have after plans in view that at present I cannot make known."

"For reasons of my own, I intend to let the mystery of *incognito* hang upon this vessel, and I feel that I will be ably supported by you."

"Now we will go to the deck and make known to the crew my intention of leaving the service of Mexico, and those among them who do not care to follow my fortunes I will land with their personal property for Vera Cruz."

"You will find the crew as ready as we are to follow your lead, captain," said Muriel, as they ascended to the deck, where the crew were soon assembled, and received the proposals of their commander with enthusiastic cheers.

In due time the schooner dropped anchor in the harbor of Vera Cruz and Noel tendered his resignation to the Mexican authorities, who accepted it with deep regret, for they were well aware of the valuable services he had rendered their tottering government.

Purchasing all necessary stores and equipments, and securing a full complement of men from several American vessels then blockaded in the port, Noel secured a light-sailing schooner, loaded her with his purchases, and a week after the arrival of the Red Wing, the two vessels set sail one dark, stormy night, and headed for the lonely island which had once been the resort of a piratical horde, and which the young commander intended should be his secret rendezvous, for Noel was determined he would not be known to his government other than as some mysterious friend ever on the alert to secretly lend a helping hand.

While the Red Wing is sailing for the island, where she is to be metamorphosed into an American privateer, I will return to the night of the engagement between the Vulture and the English sloop-of-war, and relate the circumstances following the departure of the mysterious schooner.

As Noel had surmised, the Vulture had been refitted, after being wrecked by the lightning, and was placed under command of Alden Ainslie, while Calvin Bernard, after a court-martial investigation of the part he took in the duel between his captain and lieutenant, had been found "not guilty" of any serious charge, and was allowed to return to his ship, in which he soon rose to the rank of lieutenant.

Alden Ainslie had proved himself an able officer, and under his command the Vulture had won renewed honors during her continued cruise in northern waters.

Thus it was that Captain Ainslie determined to fight, instead of fly from, the English sloop-of-war, a determination that would have cost him dear had it not been for the timely aid of the Red Wing, a schooner he had often endeavored to capture, and which had always eluded him, even though when under his guns—for, knowing that other vessels carrying the Mexican colors were in the habit of pouncing upon American merchantmen, he deemed this fleet craft likewise guilty, little knowing who it was that directed her destinies.

When the English commander had hailed the schooner, and received no answer, a feeling of awe came upon the crew, for her mysterious approach, hidden by the smoke of her guns, her still more mysterious departure, silent and beautiful, caused them to look upon her as a weird craft with a weird crew, and many low whispers ran around the fore-castle about their having surrendered to a phantom ship commanded by his Satanic majesty.

On board the Vulture the feeling was still more suspicious, among the seamen, of their having received aid from the devil, and few of them felt at all complimented that his diabolical majesty had honored them with his favor, for they feared, like the cat and the mouse, that he was toying with them only to make his presence more severely felt at a future day.

All heard what passed between the English commander and his conqueror; that the surrender was accepted in the name of the Vulture, and their vessel being known to the stranger was but another cause for surprise, and in some cases dread.

Alden Ainslie had fought his vessel bravely, and only when he felt it was a useless loss of life did he intend to strike his colors, for he was compelled to admit his powerful antagonist was getting the best of the battle; but as the words of surrender were upon his lips he was startled by a loud crash of artillery from another quarter, and he first beheld the unexpected ally that had pounced suddenly down upon the Englishman.

Unable to recognize the craft in the smoke that enveloped her, yet seeing that the Englishman was suffering severely, Captain Ainslie determined to fight on, and soon had the satisfaction of hearing his foe cry for quarter.

As soon as he could collect his boat's crew he left the Vulture and was put on board the English vessel, where he was met by her commander, who politely, yet stiffly, invited him into the cabin, as he tendered his sword.

"No, captain; retain your sword, sir, and as your vessel and crew, like my own, have suffered severely, if you will give me your *parole d'honneur* you can still hold command and follow me into port."

"Assuredly I give my *parole*, sir, and heartily thank you for your considerate kindness; but to whom have I surrendered, may I ask?" answered the Englishman.

"I am Alden Ainslie, commander of the American brig-of-war Vulture; but the name of my timely ally I am ignorant of."

"A strange craft and a strange commander, I judge; but doubtless some American privateer, that, trusting to her swift heels, ventured near enough to give you a helping hand, and I assure you a strong one, for he raked me fore and aft with terrible effect."

"But why should he thus disguise his name and nation?" asked Captain Ainslie, in a puzzled tone.

"That I know not, for one would think he would only be too willing to exhibit his bantam form, and crow loudly over his achievement."

"Yes, one would think so, yet yonder he goes, still enveloped in smoke and looking most spectral in the moonlight," and all eyes turned upon the flying schooner.

"Could you not bring him to? I have some long range guns forward that are at your service, and I confess to a curiosity to see the bold mariner who controls yonder craft," and the Englishman raised his glass to his eye.

"No, thank you; I will not do so; he has served me nobly, and I will respect his desire to remain unknown," answered Ainslie.

"Nobly said, sir; but my men believe yonder craft is run by a devilish crew, and though education destroys, or should destroy, superstition, yet I confess to a feeling of uneasiness regarding her strange appearance, even though the voice of her commander, when he hailed me, had a most metallic, quarter-deck ring."

"I am also puzzled, captain, but attribute the strange conduct of the craft to a freak of the commander, and not to an unearthly agency; but now I must return to my vessel, and as soon as my damages are somewhat repaired I will head for Mobile, where you will please follow, even though we become separated on the way."

"You may rely upon my honor, Captain Ainslie, and I thank you for your kind consideration toward myself and crew," and the Englishman held forth his hand toward Alden, who grasped it firmly, for he respected his brave though unfortunate foe.

The two officers then parted, and just at daybreak, their vessels having been temporarily repaired, the dead consigned to their sea-graves, and the wounded cared for, the Vulture got under way, followed by the English sloop-of-war, the crew of which fully appreciated the kindness shown them by their brave young captor, who had proven himself as generous as he was daring. All on board the Englishman had anticipated an easy victory over their smaller antagonist, and keenly felt their mistake, for had not the American been so mysteriously aided their conquest would have been a dear one.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FLYING YANKEE.

A YEAR passed after the incidents related in the foregoing chapters, and the Vulture, thoroughly refitted and with a better armament and larger crew, was again at sea.

Her course lay to the southward, down the Atlantic coast from Charleston, from whence she had sailed on a special mission, to bear Commodore Cutting to take command of the American squadron then cruising in the Gulf of Mexico.

It was a clear moonlight night, but the sea ran high, for a heavy gale was blowing from the northeast; but bravely the noble vessel struggled through the waters, staggering through only under her storm-sails.

Upon her decks were officers and crew, some enjoying the struggle between the ocean and the vessel and others attending carefully to the duties devolving upon them.

Standing near the wheel upon the quarter-deck were several officers chatting, and recognizable among them were the tall and commanding form of Commodore Cutting, the elegant figure of Alden Ainslie, and the indolent, graceful Calvin Bernard, whose left arm was worn in a sling, for he had not yet fully recovered from a wound received in the battle with the English sloop-of-war.

The arrival of the Vulture in port, with her larger foe as a prize, had created considerable excitement, especially when Captain Ainslie, disclaiming all credit, had made known the circumstance of being aided by his strange ally.

Since then, incoming vessels had reported the appearance at sea of a strange craft that was the true friend of America, and the bitter foe of England, and many were the remarkable stories of how she was seen only at night, enveloped in a cloud of smoke, and looking like a specter barque, also seeming like one, as, excepting a stern hail from her and the sound of her terrible guns, no one had ever held communication with a soul on board.

The subject of conversation that night on the Vulture, as she bounded over the gale-swept ocean, was this strange craft, and Commodore Cutting had just remarked his inability to solve the mystery, when Alden Ainslie rejoined:

"Commodore, I am not superstitious, but I assure you the sudden appearance and strange behavior of that craft when she saved the Vulture from capture made a deep impression upon me, an impression which the numerous rumors now afloat but serve to strengthen."

"And that impression is, captain—"

"I hardly know; for, though I would laugh to scorn the belief that the craft is a phantom, strongly inclined to favor America, yet what is she? I ask, and the answer is, a white schooner of remarkable build and speed, and one that carries full sail in a storm, which would run any other vessel beneath the sea."

"And one that no one has ever been on board of, as far as we know—that has only hailed from her own decks, and though capturing prizes has never boarded them, but driven them before her into some

port, where they have been safe under the guns of our forts," put in an old weather-beaten sailing-master, who had passed forty years upon the ocean.

"Has she ever been seen in the daytime?" asked Commodore Cutting.

"Yes," returned the sailing-master, "she has been seen in daylight by her prizes, for I talked with a man who was mate of that English powder-ship she captured."

"And what said the mate?" asked Commodore Cutting, with interest, while the group of officers gathered more closely around, to hear the reply.

"He told me what I will now tell you, and, though he is a kind of kinsman of mine, and my mother-in-law's brother, I place dependence in his word, though I have little faith in the mother of any man's wife, as the world goes, for the Lord Harry knows they are a queer set; not that a woman mayn't be all right, but let her get a son-in-law, and sounds, sir, it changes her whole nature! Such has been my experience, and I give it for the benefit of those young gentlemen here, who, you know, have the reputation of possessing a wife in every foreign port, for woman's eyes always glitter at sight of a brass button, and I warn them that they'll fare badly, and have a lively time at the Day of Judgment, when they have to meet a dozen or so mothers-in-law."

"But to the story, Mr. Hendricks," said the commodore, amused at the master's opinion of his wife's mother.

"True, sir; well, you see, the old lady—"

"Hang the old lady, Hendricks."

"So I say, sir; but, you see, when I run athwart the memory of the old girl, she just boxes my compass, and it's hard to keep before the wind on any other course; but I remember now, we were discussing the strange craft, and I was saying she was most beautiful in build—"

"You were saying no such thing, Hendricks; why, I verily believe the remembrance of the good dame has driven your wits from you—you were about to tell us what the mate of the powder-ship told you."

"True, sir, true; well, Thompson—you see he spelt his name with a P, sir—well, he told me that they were running along pretty lively one night, and hoping to reach a haven held by the English, when suddenly they descried a misty blue light across the ocean, and in its midst was the most beautiful specter craft eye ever beheld."

"Thompson says all of them were scared nearly to death, when a flash, a heavy boom, and a whirl of solid shot proved the specter could use mortal means, and this reassuring the captain of the powder-ship, he hoisted all sail, and determined to escape, for his vessel was one of the fastest afloat; but, crowding sail was useless, for in less than an hour the stranger came up close astern, and hailing in a loud voice, told the Englishman to change his course, and head for Charleston, as a prize to the United States Government."

"Compelled to obey, the Englishman did as ordered, and the stranger then shortened sail so as to hang half a mile distant in his wake, and there he continued, day and night, until he drove the powder-ship under the guns of Fort Sumter, when the queer one put about and headed seaward."

"But, what did your relative say the craft looked like by daylight?" asked Alden Ainslie.

"He said she was a beauty, and only once could he see more than one man on board, and that was the helmsman; but he related how, when his captain thought one day in a blow, as his pursuer had dropped a mile astern, he would try to escape, that suddenly a hundred forms stood in snow-white—you see the schooner was white from hull to topmast—were seen to spring to work lively, and in a minute the Flying Yankee, as the Britishers call the stranger, was after them like a hound, and the poor captain had to once more keep on his prescribed course, still dogged by his captor."

"A remarkable story, sailing-master, but it is generally believed, and I confess to a deep-seated desire to know more of this terror of the British—the Flying Yankee; why, I would give my next year's pay to solve that—"

"Sail, ho!"

The ringing cry of the look-out from the mast-head broke short the words of the commodore, and caused all to start, for the conversation they were holding regarding the mysterious character of the strange vessel, caused all to feel a certain superstitious dread in their hearts.

"Where-a-way, sir?"

"She is not in sight, now, sir; but a moment ago I beheld her—sail, ho!"

"Sail, ho!"

"Sail, ho!"

The cries rung out suddenly from a dozen different parts of the vessel, and all eyes turned to windward, where they beheld a sight that sent a thrill of horror through the ship.

A mile or more distant, and distinctly seen in a bluish, misty cloud, that looked spectral in the moonlight, was a large schooner, crouching low in the water, and with her tapering masts crowded with canvas from deck to topmast, while, as light as a bird, she seemed to fly from wave to wave.

"God in Heaven! It is the specter craft!" cried the old sailing-master, while a dozen voices said in suppressed tones:

"The Flying Yankee!"

"Yes, boys, the Flying Yankee; and it remains with us to solve the mystery, for though she has proven a friend to us, we will find out who and what she is. Clear that port-gun, Mr. Bernard!" cried the commodore, cheerfully.

"It is impossible to clear for action in this gale, commodore," suggested Alden Ainslie, as the men hesitated what to do.

"True; well, we'll bide our time and see the re-

sult. See! how she comes down upon us!" and Commodore Cutting pointing to the misty-looking schooner, that, with apparently every stitch of her snowy canvas spread, was rushing down upon their quarter, and rapidly overhauling the brig.

"Yes, she seems to fly, for I can already distinguish the two men at her wheel," answered Captain Ainslie, as he turned his glass once more on the approaching vessel.

All stood in silence, regarding the stranger, each officer and man instinctively taking his position for action, and each one turning over in his mind what could be the meaning of the strange appearance.

Bounding madly forward, over and through the storm-swept waters, the Flying Yankee came on, until she obtained a position to windward, and off the starboard quarter of the brig, when suddenly a tall form, clothed in white, sprang into the main shrouds, and in trumpet tones came the hail:

"Ahoy! the Vulture!"

"My God! he knows us! It is the devil that runs that craft!" cried the sailing-master, with awe.

"Silence, sir!" sternly said Captain Ainslie, and then through his trumpet, he answered, "Ahoy! Is that the Flying Yankee?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came the answer.

"Well, what would you?" again asked Alden.

"Commodore Cutting is aboard your vessel, going to take command of the Southern squadron; but your fleet was defeated some days since, and driven into Mobile, where they now are, while a large English man-of-war, in a crippled condition, is, at present, repairing damages in the mouth of the St. John's river. The two vessels taken by the English fleet, are now armed with British crews, and lying in wait to take you by strategy upon your arrival."

The above had all been spoken in clear tones, and one and all heard every word with strange surprise and deep regret, for none doubted the information received from their mysterious companion.

"Is all this true you tell?" called out the commodore, in his stentorian voice.

"Upon my honor, yes."

"I thank you; but in the name of heaven, who, and what are you?"

"The Flying Yankee, and the Ocean Outcast."

The words rung with metallic earnestness, and a tone of deep bitterness pervaded them; but more could be said, the commander of the weird-looking vessel sprang back upon his deck, and instantly the sharp bows swept round, until the long, needle-like bow-sprit pointed just into the wind's eye, when, away darted the Flying Yankee, back in the direction from whence she had first been discovered.

"Well, commodore, what do you think of that?"

"I know not what to think, Ainslie; but I believe his words, and shall act accordingly; what say you?"

"As you do; I believe the expected British fleet has had good weather, and arrived two weeks sooner than we anticipated, thereby surprising our squadron; but, would it not be a good idea, sir, to put into the mouth of the St. John's, and verify the statement of the Flying Yankee? We may be able to surprise and capture the crippled Britisher."

"That is a good plan, and one I will act upon, so give the necessary orders, please. Ah! yonder still flies that weird craft under a press of sail that, in this gale, would run a line of battle-ship under," and the commodore pointed to the distant schooner, still beating up into the wind, without having reduced a single square foot of canvas, as she sped on, leaving behind her a most uncomfortable feeling in the minds of all on board the Vulture, for they could not get rid of the thought that some supernatural agency controlled the destinies of the mysterious unknown.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GRAND PRIZE.

Toward nightfall of the day following the meeting with the Flying Yankee, the Vulture sighted the coast of Florida, and a few hours after glided slowly into the mouth of the St. John's river, where she came to anchor close under the shadows of the foliage-clad banks.

Calvin Bernard was then sent off in the largest cutter, with a picked crew well-armed, to reconnoiter and discover the whereabouts of the British vessel-of-war, for none doubted that the words of the Flying Yankee would prove true.

Midnight came, and the returning boat was observed approaching through the gloom with rapid stroke, and, springing to the deck, Calvin Bernard informed his superior officers that a British vessel, as well as he could judge, a large, square-rigger, carrying forty guns and a full crew, was lying moored to the river bank, some six miles above, while her men were encamped on the shore near by.

"I should think she was undergoing a thorough overhauling," continued the lieutenant, "for all of her crew appeared to be ashore, assembled around their camp-fires, and I noticed that her mizenmast had been shot away and her bulwarks seriously shattered, for I was within a cable's length of her, and the camp-fires cast a ruddy light upon her hull."

"She is wholly unsuspecting then of our presence?" said Captain Ainslie.

"Yes, it must be so, and can be taken by surprise; otherwise it would be madness to attempt to attack a vessel so very much our superior as—God bless us! see there!"

All turned quickly at the sudden exclamation of the young lieutenant, and beheld almost upon them, and sweeping by before a stiff breeze, the Flying Yankee, still carrying a press of canvas and enveloped in the misty halo that appeared to pervade her everywhere from topmast to deck.

Ere a word could be said the same form, before seen, sprang into the main shrouds, and his clear voice hailed:

"Ahoy! the Vulture!"

"Ahoy!" cried Commodore Cutting.

"Would you take the Englishman, get at once under weigh; go silently to quarters, double-shot your guns, and follow me," came the ringing order, as the schooner swept by, and soon disappeared around a curve in the river.

At once all was activity on board the Vulture, for not an instant did the commodore and Captain Ainslie hesitate to obey; the anchor came up at a run, the sails were let fall, the bows swung off, and swiftly and silently, with her men and officers ready and eager for action, the Vulture sped on in the wake of her strange guide, determined, come what might, to follow to the bitter end the adventure before her.

Yet, fleet as was the brig-of-war, the Flying Yankee rapidly left her astern, and Calvin Bernard had just remarked that ere long they would round a bend that would give them a view of the British, when suddenly loud cries were heard ahead, drowned the moment after by the roar of artillery, which, with mighty echo, reverberated along the wooded shores.

"The Flying Yankee has opened, for I recognize the peculiar roar and rattle of her guns," exclaimed Alden, quickly, and as he spoke, peal after peal of artillery shook the air, mingled with loud cries and stern orders.

The next instant the Vulture rounded the bend, to behold a strange and stirring scene.

The Flying Yankee was sailing swiftly by the Englishman, about a cable's length distant from the ship, and her decks were ablaze with light as her guns were discharged with lightning speed and perfect regularity by what appeared to be a ghostly crew, for every man was clothed in pure white, while his face was concealed beneath a closely-fitting mask of bright crimson.

Each gun from the strange vessel was most skillfully aimed, and sent death and demoralization into the British camp. In vain did the English officers strive to rally their crew and lead them aboard their crippled vessel to man the guns.

As the crew of the Vulture gazed upon the exciting scene the Flying Yankee passed on up the river for a short distance, and then gracefully and swiftly coming around headed down-stream, while her starboard guns again opened upon the frightened Englishmen, and with terrible effect.

Having sped by the line-of-battle ship the beautiful schooner ceased firing as suddenly as she had commenced; her ports were closed, and as silently and peacefully as a toy ship, she flew down the river until she came abreast the Vulture, that was rushing on to meet her foe with all haste.

All eyes sought the beautiful schooner and observed the same man upon her quarter-deck who had before hailed them; but his face was masked behind a crimson shield, and defied recognition.

"I have thrown them into confusion; push on and lay the Vulture alongside the ship, and she is yours."

"Ay, ay, sir!" cried Alden Ainslie, and the crew broke out in three lusty cheers for the Flying Yankee, which, the next moment, rounded the bend and disappeared from their sight in her seaward flight.

"Ainslie, he has won for us the ship, for see—the British are thoroughly demoralized! Helmsman, bring her closer yet! Now, Captain Ainslie, a bold rush and you have your prize," cried the old commodore, with enthusiasm.

"Ay, ay, sir! At the guns there! Aim at that crowd rushing for the ship; fire!"

The Vulture's hoarse guns belched forth fire and iron hail, checking the advance of the few men whom their officers had rallied and were leading toward their ship; but momentary was the halt, for again the English rushed on.

"Fire away, my hearties; aim true, and load heavy, or they'll meet us yet on their own decks! Steady as you are, helmsman! there, that will do! Now, Mr. Hendricks, strip her of sail—lively, lively, and she'll float up gently and not crush an egg, and, cheered by their captain's distinct orders the crew of the Vulture sprang to their work.

Stripped of her canvas, yet still forging forward and obeying her helm, the Vulture soon ran gently alongside the Englishman, and in an instant the two ships were lashed firmly together, broadside to broadside.

With a yell the Americans followed their gallant captain upon the Englishman's decks, just as the British seamen, headed by their officers, clambered over the other bulwarks, and at once the combat became fierce and sanguinary.

Affrighted at the sudden terrific spectacle of the Flying Yankee, cut down in their camp by her murderous guns and beaten back from their ship, the English were taken at a disadvantage, and it was some time ere their officers could rally their superstitious crew to action, for one and all had heard of the weird schooner that so resistlessly swept the seas; but, when the specter craft, as they believed it to be, headed seaward, and they were confronted with a mortal crew and a bona fide vessel, they quickly sprang to their posts and bravely met the Americans face to face, although their numbers had been greatly reduced by the fire of their unknown foe.

Had it not been for the unexpected aid from the Flying Yankee, there is but little doubt that the Americans would have been defeated, even though they had surprised their enemies, for they were greatly outnumbered both in men and guns; but having this advantage, and possessing both skill and indomitable courage, Captain Ainslie and his crew after a short but terrible contest hurled their foes from their vessel's decks, and training their own guns upon their camps, compelled them to ask for quarter.

Suddenly the British laid down their arms, and Alden Ainslie found that he had captured one of the finest vessels in the English navy.

Learning from the English commander that the report of the Flying Yankee was correct, as regarded the defeat of the American squadron in the Gulf, Commodore Cutting at once determined to dispatch his prisoners to Savannah overland, and bring back an American crew for the prize, which, in the meantime, could be refitted for sea, so as to sail in company with the Vulture.

From Sir Macy Northcote, the British commander, Commodore Cutting could glean no information as to what was the mystery hanging over the Flying Yankee, and the Englishman was greatly surprised to learn that the weird vessel was as wholly unknown to the navy of the United States as to that of Great Britain.

"The strange-looking vessel first appeared to us," said Sir Macy, in his interview with Commodore Cutting, "in the heat of battle, and her guns were fired with the greatest precision; so much so, in fact, that I poured upon her several broadsides, although severely pressed at the time by one of your large cruisers."

"Apparently my aim was bad, for the schooner remained unhurt, and as she disappeared in the smoke of battle shortly after, I forgot about her until the action was over, and then nowhere could she be seen. I put in here for repairs, for I sadly needed them, and the schooner must have dogged in my wake, as you say it was from her you gained the information regarding my whereabouts."

"Your crew, I see, stand in terrible fear of the Flying Yankee," said Alden Ainslie.

"Yes, captain; they look upon her with holy awe, for strange rumors regarding her mysterious movements and appearance were afloat in England before we left, and all they have seen here goes to strengthen their belief in the supernatural powers of the Flying Yankee. Can you make no guess as to what she is, by whom commanded, or the motive that leads to her masquerade?"

"None; no more can I solve that than I can the problem of the spectral light that appears to surround her, and the cloud of mist, or smoke, in which she seems always enveloped," said Commodore Cutting.

"Strange, very strange."

"It is indeed; yet in the tones of her commander—and I confess I never heard a voice more ringing and stern—I think I trace something familiar."

"And I also, Commodore, for I could swear to having heard his voice before. Have you thought of whom it reminds you?" asked Alden Ainslie.

"Yes, it sounds like the voice of poor Moncrief in battle, for you remember he sailed under me for years."

"Yes, it had the same startling, ringing tones I have heard from Noel when in action, but then it cannot be he."

"Moncrief, Moncrief? Was not that the name of one of your most brilliant officers, who slew his superior in a duel and then fled his native land? I was cruising in these waters at the time," said Sir Macy.

"Yes, poor fellow, he fled in his own yacht, accompanied by one companion who had aided his escape from the Vulture, and as he put into New York and armed and equipped his little craft, I feared he had determined to turn free rover, and my fears were realized."

"He became a pirate, then?" asked Sir Macy.

"So it was believed, and met a sad fate, for some two years ago his yacht, which had been committing some depredations along the Gulf coast, and upon Southern commerce, was attacked by a revenue cutter, and refusing to surrender, was sunk with all on board."

"He died game, even though a pirate."

"Yes, it was just like Moncrief to die at his guns, poor fellow," and an expression of sad regret stole over the face of the old commodore, for he had dearly loved the erring young naval officer, to whom he owed his life, for in a gale at sea, when swept away by a huge wave that washed his vessel's decks, Commodore Cutting would have sunk to rise no more, had not Noel, knowing his commander could not swim, sprung overboard and sustained him until the life-boat was launched and both were rescued from their peril.

Noel Moncrief was a midshipman then, and years had gone by since, but still the old seaman had not forgotten the brave preserver of his life, and mourned in secret his fate.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON BOARD THE SEA-SLIPPER.

ONE pleasant afternoon, toward the close of the English and American war of "1812," there sailed from the port of Mobile a gracefully-built clipper ship, carrying an extraordinary press of canvas, and presenting a smart, naval-like appearance for a merchantman.

Heading Gulfward, for she was bound to Havana, the ship sped on with great speed, dashing the foam from her bows, and trailing after her a snowy, vail-like wake, as the stiff breeze urged her onward.

Anxious to gain a good offing, the captain of the Sea-Slipper paced his deck, eyed his ship narrowly to see that every rope and sail was in its place, and ever and anon scanned the horizon with eager glances, for he was desirous of gaining the open waters, ere he was headed off by the British cruisers, then blockading the Gulf ports of America.

Having been imprisoned in port for some time by the presence of the enemy outside, Captain Davenport had boldly determined to run the blockade and escape, even if he lost his ship in the attempt; but, being a brave man, and the commander of a vessel that had seldom met her equal upon the ocean in point of speed, he decided to run the gantlet, if possible, and reach Havana, for he had a valuable freight des-

tinued for the West Indies, besides several Spanish and American passengers, anxious to leave the country, some to return home, others on account of business, and a few for pleasure.

Rather than be blockaded for an indefinite time in port, the passengers were willing to risk the danger of running out, trusting in the weatherly qualities and speed of the Sea-Slipper, and the courage and skill of Captain Davenport, who had armed and manned his vessel with five guns, and a crew of forty men, which would enable him to beat off any small enemy that might cross his path.

Miles off to windward the eye of Captain Davenport noted several sail which he well knew to be British cruisers, and from them his glance fell upon a dark cloud that broke the level circle of the horizon, and his face wore a serious look, for he had not anticipated having to brave a storm as well as the English, for well he knew, unless he gained a good offing before the gale broke upon the sea, he might be driven back by it, or into the midst of his foes.

Near by the captain, leaning upon the taffrail, and also glancing at the distant sail, stood two personages, whose bronzed complexions and dark eyes betokened their nationality, or that they were of the Spanish race; but the reader has met them before, so a description is not necessary, for they are father and daughter, Don Octavio Guido and the lovely Violeta, whom the bravery of Noel, and the speed of his little yacht, had saved from capture nearly three years before, when chased by the pirate *drogher* off the coast of Cuba.

Since that time Don Octavio and Violeta had been traveling in Europe, and afterward in America, but in all their roamings they had not forgotten their strange preserver, of whom they could never gain the slightest clue as to his whereabouts.

Afraid they had spoken of Noel, and his rather abrupt refusal of their invitation to their home in Havana, and seldom did his handsome, sad face pass from the mental vision of the Cuban maiden.

Now they were upon their return home, having been detained, beyond their intended stay in America, by the war between the United States and England, and glad at the prospect of once more setting foot upon their "beautiful Isle of the sea," both father and daughter wore a joyous look, as the Sea-Slipper leaned majestically to the breeze and bounded rapidly along the restless waters.

Promenading the deck, with an exceedingly steady tread for a landsman and landswoman, were two other passengers, the one a dignified, noble-looking gentleman, with snow-white hair and mustache, and a figure erect and military, while leaning upon his arm was a maiden of surpassing loveliness in both form and feature, though there rested upon the refined face a look of touching sadness, for the drooping of the heavily-fringed eyebrows could not hide the wells of sorrow within.

The two were characters also heretofore brought before the reader, for they were Colonel Moncrief and his ward, Eve Eldred, for love of whom a brother had raised his hand against a brother's life.

A dark shadow had fallen upon the Moncrief Manor after the flight of Noel, and the blow had well-nigh killed the loving father and the maiden, but Time heals all wounds of the heart, or at least cicatrizes them, and once again contentment, if not happiness, rested upon the grand old homestead.

Then the cry of war aroused the sleeping fire in the bosom of every American, and sending for a lady relative to come and live at the manor with Eve, Governor Moncrief buckled on his armor, and, at the head of a regiment, took the field against America's foes.

Time flew on, its wings laden with the honors, the glory, the sorrows of war, and at length Colonel Moncrief fell, severely wounded, at the head of his regiment, and was borne from the field in an almost lifeless state.

But, after weeks of suffering, he recovered sufficiently to return to his home, where he remained for some months, unfit for service in the field, until advised by his physicians to seek a change of climate, the better to restore his health.

Acting upon this suggestion, and accompanied by his ever-faithful nurse, for he loved Eve Eldred as though she were his own daughter—the two had set sail in the Sea-Slipper, determined to pass the winter in Havana, and already with renewed vigor, as he inhaled the fresh sea air, the colonel paced, with quick tread, the decks of the gallant vessel.

"Sail, ho!" suddenly rings from abaft, in the clear tones of the look-out, and instantly all on board are eagerly scanning the blue horizon for the strange vessel.

"Whereaway?" cries Captain Davenport, a stout, weather-beaten old sailor, as he glances aloft.

"Dead ahead, sir."

"What do you make of her, my man?"

"She is schooner rig, sir, and is standing toward us."

"All right; keep a close watch upon her movements," called out the captain; and then, turning to his passengers, who were now grouped near him, he continued:

"Doubtless she is some of our American privateers, and, if so, will divide the honor with us of being chased by yonder two British cruisers."

"I think you have no cause to dread capture, captain, for the Sea-Slipper runs like the wind," said Colonel Moncrief, gazing with admiration at the speed of the ship, as, with everything drawing taut, she bowled merrily along.

"No, sir, I fear none of those heavy craft, unless we run on them ere we know it, and they cripple us; and, in fact, I believe there is scarcely a vessel afloat that can catch us in a stern chase, on almost any wind."

"You forget the Flying Yankee, captain," said the

first mate, who was standing near, his glass leveled upon the newly-discovered sail.

"True, she can catch us upon any wind."

"The Flying Yankee! You have then met with this ocean mystery, captain!" said Colonel Moncrief, with interest, and around the old seaman at once gathered Don Guido, Violeta and other passengers.

"I have sir, and the craft is indeed a mystery; in fact, I have not only met her, but the Sea-Slipper was once saved from capture by her."

"Indeed! Will you tell us the story, captain?" asked Don Octavio, with considerable interest—an interest that seemed shared by all present.

"It is a short story, but I will tell it you with pleasure, ladies and gentlemen."

"You see, it was on my last run into Mobile that I was chased by two British war vessels, a brig and a square-rigger, and I was showing them a clean pair of heels and rapidly running for a haven, when suddenly round a point of land came a swift-sailing brig, that at once showed armed ports and the flag of England waving over them."

"This was a scrape I little liked, and I felt that my chances of gaining port were slim indeed, for the vessels in chase were but four miles astern, and the one last discovered, just in my course, and hardly half that distance away."

"I determined to round the point upon a different course from the one I was then on, and endeavor to keep the land between myself and my new enemy."

"But it was of no use, and I was about to attempt to run the gantlet and again put to sea, when suddenly I descried a strange sail coming from a small inlet and shooting just across my bow, so as to head me off, I believed; but I soon found it was the brig that was the game, for the new-comer, whose audacity surprised myself and crew not a little, she being a schooner and little able, we believed, to cope with the powerful brig-of-war, headed directly for the Englishman."

"Lying low in the water, and with a prow as sharp as a blade, her decks overshadowed by masses of snow-white sails, the plucky little craft flew on at a speed I believed hardly possible, and coming in range opened with a large gun, mounted upon her fore-castle, upon the Englishman, who was soon compelled to let the Sea-Slipper go, and look after the schooner."

"With a precision that was remarkable, the schooner's guns were fired, and though the brig opened heavily also, it was of no use, for in fifteen minutes she was a wreck, and the daring craft that had proven more than a match for her, was standing out to sea, without having received a single shot, that I could see, to mar the beauty of her white hull and sails."

"As for the Sea-Slipper, she escaped, and as far as we could see, we observed the schooner flying seaward, firing rapidly from her stern guns upon the two vessels-of-war, that had given up chasing me to pursue the audacious American craft."

"That little craft was what is known as the Flying Yankee, and whoever her commander is, he has won a reputation for bravery and seamanship second to that of no man in our navy."

"If he be a man at all," suggested Mr. Conover the mate, in a voice of superstitious doubt.

"Nonsense, Conover; the schooner has won her name of Flying Yankee by her wonderful speed, and her determined war upon the enemies of our mighty Yankee nation. As for the mystery which overhangs her, it arises from the fact that, excepting to hail a vessel, none on board the queer craft ever hold converse with mortals."

"How about the smoke in which she seems to float, captain, and the strange light that hangs around her?" asked the doubting mate.

"There you have me, for that I cannot explain."

"Does she carry no colors, captain?" asked Colonel Moncrief.

"She carries no national colors, sir—only a flag representing a schooner sailing upon a tempest-tossed sea, the craft appearing to be worked in white silk, with the waters around her a pale green, while a shadowy cloud appears to pervade the air around the weird-looking craft."

"If every report be true, the Flying Yankee has been of the greatest service to the American cause, for I have heard of her protecting and conveying a number of our merchantmen into port, and also of several desperate actions she has had with British cruisers double her size and metal," said Colonel Moncrief.

"Yes, sir, and report says true of her, but—What do you say, my man?" and the captain glanced toward the man in the main-top who had hailed the deck.

"The sail ahead, sir, is the Flying Yankee."

Instantly there was a scene of excitement on deck, and while the captain and mate ascended the rigging with their glasses, the eyes of the passengers were turned upon the distant vessel, which was now plainly visible to the naked eye.

"Senorita, will you look?" and Don Guido tendered his own handsome spy-glass to Eve, who, with a smile of thanks, took it, and turned it upon the strange sail.

"My daughter believes she can trace a resemblance between the schooner and one of her build that often used to be seen upon our coast, and which Spaniards had cause to dread. I refer to the Mexican cruiser that gained such a name for daring, and was known as the Red Wing," said Don Octavio, addressing Colonel Moncrief.

"Yes, I have heard of the cruiser; but of late years she has disappeared from the seas. Some say she foundered with all on board," answered the colonel.

"No, senor, I am confident yonder schooner is the same, for I was wont to sit in our plantation-home

and gaze for hours upon the Red Wing, whose cruising-ground was near us for months," remarked Violeta.

"You found the Red Wing then a merciful foe, it seems?" questioned Eve, turning her beautiful eyes upon the face of her scarcely less lovely companion. "Yes; never did we have cause to dread the terrible craft; but see, I am now the more convinced yonder schooner is the Red Wing. Although her topmasts seem far taller, and she is painted white, yet she has the same sharp bow, great breadth amidships, and lean stern, with the same low hull and tapering masts, as well as the great length of bowsprit that the Mexican had," continued Violeta, still keeping the glass to her eye.

"Why, lady, you are quite a sailor," remarked Colonel Moncrief, with surprised admiration.

"Yes, sir; my father is a yachtsman and I have passed much of my time in sailing with him," returned Violeta, and the ice of reserve having been broken between them the two gentlemen and maidens soon became most friendly with each other.

"Well, captain, what do you make of the craft?" asked Don Guido, as the old seaman descended to the deck.

"It is the shadow schooner, sir."

"Captain, my daughter Violeta thinks she recognizes in her Spain's old enemy, the Red Wing."

"Ha, say you so? Why, lady, you are a better sailor than I am, for I now see the resemblance that tortured my mind when I first met the Flying Yankee, to recall the craft she reminded me of; I believe you are right, for I once came athwart the Mexican cruiser, Red Wing, and I will say I never met a more perfect gentleman than was her commander, or a more thorough seaman."

"I was in Havana, awaiting repairs to my vessel, not the Sea-Slipper, but a brig, that had been dismantled in a hurricane, and, hearing ill news from home, I took passage in a Spanish vessel bound to New Orleans, and when three days out we were chased and overhauled by the Red Wing."

"The largest number of our passengers were women, and so observing, for we could not keep them below, the young pirate would not fire upon us, but ran the gantlet of our guns, boarded us, and captured the ship in ten minutes, although our crew outnumbered him two to one."

"Finding that the freight was owned by American merchants he would touch nothing, and after half an hour let the ship go on in peace."

"Yes, yonder schooner is very much like the Red Wing, and I would say it was that famous craft, had she not been said to have gone down in a gale."

The schooner was now hardly more than a mile distant, but suddenly changing her course she stood off from the ship's course, and nightfall coming on soon after, she disappeared from the sight of those on board the Sea-Slipper.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE MYSTERIOUS PILOT.

As night came on the wind arose to a gale and the sea began to pitch more and more violently, as the Sea-Slipper, under close-reefed sails, flew on, her crew at their posts, and passengers, well wrapped up, huddled together upon the quarter-deck.

All were anxious regarding the safety of the vessel, for each moment the storm swept on with greater force, and the British cruisers had so maneuvered that they had managed to get the advantage of the clipper, by heading her off and still keeping to seaward of her, and Captain Davenport began to dread the thought of having to put back before the storm and again seek the port from which he had sailed.

Upon his port-quarter was a low point of wooded land, jutting miles into the sea, which he had hoped to clear ere the cruisers had discovered his intention of running out, but the increase of the wind and heavy beat of the waves had so retarded his progress that when night came on, with its gloom and gale, he had not weathered the land, although the good ship had done her utmost to accomplish all that was expected of her.

"Conover have you the bearings of that point of land?" suddenly asked Captain Davenport of his mate.

"Ay, ay, sir; it is just now off our port-quarter."

"Is that light not from some cabin on the land, for you know since the war broke out the light-house has not been kept?" and as Captain Davenport spoke he pointed ahead to a light but indistinctly seen through the haze.

"No, sir, that is a vessel."

"Then, by heaven! we are headed off—ha!"

As the captain spoke there suddenly shot up into the air a bright rocket, which momentarily lit up the gloom, and a large vessel-of-war was descried not more than half a mile distant, and dead ahead of the clipper.

"Stand ready all to wear ship!" suddenly cried the captain, in ringing tones, and while the words were yet upon his lips there came an answering signal off the starboard-bow, another off the starboard-quarter, and still another a short distance astern.

"By heaven! we are in for it now, with Britishers ahead, abeam and astern of us. That fellow on our port-bow has just rounded the point of land yonder," and Captain Davenport turned, for a moment not knowing what to do in the great danger that threatened him.

"They are all heavy vessels, captain, and we would be sunk by their metal did we attempt to run the gantlet," quietly remarked Colonel Moncrief.

"Yes, I fear we are dishied; but were there no passengers with me I would beach my ship, escape to the land, and thus disappoint the English; but I cannot give up the ship, yet."

"Are there no harbors upon the coast to which you can run?" asked Don Octavio, quickly.

"Yes, there are several inlets there, off our starboard-beam, but we have no pilot, and it would be madness to make the attempt; but I must act and at once—Ha! what have we here? By all that's glorious—"

"Clipper ship, ahoy!" suddenly pealed forth a ringing voice, that interrupted the words of Captain Davenport, and at the same moment there hovered above the decks of the Sea-Slipper clouds of snowy canvas, while the rush of the wind through cordage and rigging sounded like the roar of the surf upon the beach.

"The Flying Yankee! The Flying Yankee!" cried a dozen voices, while Captain Davenport in tones slightly tremulous, cried:

"Ahoy! the schooner!"

"You are surrounded by British cruisers, and have but one chance of escape," cried the same ringing voice that had hailed, and which cut through the noise of the storm, although the schooner was a cable's length distant off the port-beam.

"And that is—?" asked Captain Davenport through his trumpet, while his crew and passengers, in awestricken silence, awaited in breathless eagerness the reply.

"Rig a light in one of your lifeboats; set the boat adrift, wear ship immediately after, put out every lantern on board, and follow in the wake of the Flying Yankee."

The orders were clear; all on board heard them, and ere the captain could say a word his men sprung to obey. In a moment's time a lifeboat was lowered over the lee-quarter into the sea, having two battle-lanterns swung on spars in the stern and stern.

At the same instant the Sea-Slipper wore round quickly, in obedience to an order from Captain Davenport, and, a moment after, was dashing along in the wake of the schooner, which had put about immediately upon seeing that the instructions given would be obeyed.

Swiftly before the storm rushed the ship, leaving far behind the "decoy" she had left to deceive the British cruisers, which were gradually drawing toward a common center to hem in the American vessel that they were so anxious to make a prize.

In the meantime a change had come over the Flying Yankee, for no longer was she covered with sail, but under close-reefed canvas, was hastening on toward the point of land, which, though not visible, was known to be but a few miles away.

Upon the clipper's decks all was a scene of suppressed excitement, for well each one knew their fate hung by a slender thread, and that capture, perhaps certain death, stared them in the face.

Added to their anxiety was a certain awe at the mysterious coming of the Flying Yankee, for, until she had hailed them they suspected not her existence in their immediate neighborhood, and while the captain and his passengers felt a desire to know more of the strange visitant, and were willing to laugh at the idea of a supernatural agency controlling the schooner, yet they could not banish from their thoughts a slight tinge of superstition, which they all knew fully possessed the uneducated seamen, who were decidedly unnerved by the presence of the spectral-looking craft, that glided along so swiftly ahead of their own vessel.

Glancing astern, as the ship bowled merrily along, Captain Davenport was delighted to observe, by the lights of the approaching cruisers, that they were drawing toward the spot where the life-boat had been left, with anchor attached to a heavy cable thrown over to hold it steady, evidently believing the lights to be on the schooner, which was lying-to to await their coming.

"They are fooled nicely, and will be as mad as a nest of hornets, when they arrive at the decoy and find out their mistake," said the captain, speaking aloud the thoughts that were in every mind.

"Yes, it has fooled them, captain, and why should it not, for the devil would lead a saint astray," put in the mate, in a disconsolate tone, for he fully believed that the helm of the schooner was guided by his Satanic majesty.

"Conover you are a fool."

"Yes, Captain Davenport," responded the mate.

"Yes, for do you not see that the schooner is run by mortal hands?"

"No, I do not see anything of the kind; we saw that craft to-day, and then lost sight of her, I hoped forever; but here, in the midst of this storm, she suddenly comes upon us, and lo! we obey her orders, for it is not in the power of man to resist the commands of her skipper."

"Skipper! Who, in the devil's name, do you believe him to be?" almost angrily asked the captain.

"You have named him, sir; yonder schooner is commanded by the evil one. Laugh if you will, but did you not see she was crowded with canvas when she first came upon us, and when we again looked, she was under bare poles almost; and yet flies away from the Sea-Slipper like a bird from a bound."

"And see, yonder she goes, rushing right down upon a lee shore, and the night as dark as a nigger's face, and here we go right on in her wake like—"

"Why, Mr. Conover, you seem to be very superstitious. Do you not know the Flying Yankee has proven the friend of Americans?" asked the sweetly modulated voice of Eve Eldred.

"Yes, miss, the devil is a friend to all sinners."

"You are inclined to be complimentary, Mr. Conover; but as your brain is working too hard, I must counteract it by giving you work for your hands, so go forward and shake a reef out of the sails now set, for do you not see our pilot is dropping us rapidly astern?" and the captain spoke sternly, and in a manner that gave the mate to understand he desired no more creaking.

"Ha! they are letting out the secret on yonder old liner, for see, there go her signals to tell their comrades the bird has flown," exclaimed Captain Davenport, a moment after, as he saw a bright rocket soar heavenward from the deck of the frigate, that had approached near enough to the decoy to observe the deception practiced.

"Yes, and I believe we will escape through the agency of our mysterious pilot—hark!" and, as Colonel Moncrief spoke, above the roar of the storm resounded a strange crashing, pealing, moaning sound, commingled, while from the forecable rung the startling cry, "*Breakers off the port bow!*"

"My God, have we followed to our ruin?" exclaimed the captain, springing to the wheel.

"*Breakers off the starboard bow!*"

"Where! Where is the schooner?"

"We are lost! Oh, Heaven have mercy!"

The cries of fright, of despair, were heard fore and aft the ship, for superstition held control over the minds of the brave seamen, who now doubted not but that they had been following a phantom ship with a phantom crew, and in dismay the captain knew not what course to pursue, when, suddenly, a lurid light burst forth like a meteor, dead ahead of the ship, and but a few cable lengths distant, and the beautiful schooner, spectral in grace and appearance, was revealed, gliding along into a narrow gorge or inlet of the land, while upon either side lowered wooded heights, whose base was washed by the mad waters that broke upon them and rebounded with terrific force and a wild roar.

"Behold! the Flying Yankee is still our friend; she leads the way!" cried Colonel Moncrief, with glad surprise, and every heart aboard the Sea-Slipper bounded with glad surprise, for they could see they were being led into a haven of safety, though it was through a most dangerous channel. Still burned the lurid light on the schooner, shedding a bright glare over the waters through which the Sea-Slipper had yet to come, while the hull and rigging of the strange vessel appeared enveloped in the same misty cloud that seemed to hang around her in all her ocean wanderings.

Upon the decks of the Flying Yankee could be seen a hundred white-clad forms, with the mask of crimson, looking most weird-like and ghastly in the peculiar glare and the shadows of the overhanging bluffs; but undaunted, the brave commander of the Sea-Slipper stood on, with a perfect confidence in his guide, until his own vessel was overhung by the wooded banks of the inlet, which was hardly more than a hundred yards wide.

A few moments more of slow but steady sailing, and suddenly the high cliffs sloped away to a sandy beach, the channel rapidly widened, and again the Sea-Slipper was in the open waters, for she had been guided through an inlet that broke, river-like, across the narrow point of land which jutted from the main far out into the Gulf.

Hardly had the Sea-Slipper gained an offing from the inlet, when, with a blaze of blinding brilliancy, that lit up earth, sea, and sky, there came a sudden midnight gloom, and when the strained eyes of the clipper's crew regained their accustomed sight, the Flying Yankee had disappeared.

But she had guided the ship to safety, had saved those on board of her from capture, perhaps death, and with thankful hearts the crew sprung to work, and soon the gallant barque was heading Gulfward, leaving far behind her the disappointed British cruisers, and the mysterious schooner that had been their savior.

CHAPTER XIX. THE BATTLE FOR THE PRIZE.

THAT all on board the Sea-Slipper were impressed by their mysterious deliverance from the English cruisers, was certain, and a thorough feeling of superstition had taken possession of the crew, for in no way could they reason themselves into the belief that the Flying Yankee was a mortal craft.

Toward daylight on the night of the Sea-Slipper's escape, the gale blew itself out, settling down to a steady six-knot breeze, that drove the gallant vessel along rapidly toward the haven for which she was bound.

During the day the passengers spent most of their time on deck, and between Don Guido and Colonel Moncrief, Eve and Violeta, there sprang up a warm feeling of friendship, which promised to drive away by social intercourse the monotony of their sea-voyage, if they could feel monotony with the dangers still threatening them, and the excitement of the commencement of their cruise, constantly the subject of conversation.

The hours of sunlight passed swiftly by, and night, clear and starlit, settled upon the still restless waters, dotted only by the canvas of the Sea-Slipper, which, under easy sail, was making seven knots, when other vessels would hardly have logged five.

"Sail, ho!"

Passengers and crew all started at the hail from the maintop, and listened attentively to the reply to Captain Davenport's "Whereaway, and what do you make of her?"

"She is crossing our wake, sir; a brig-of-war, as well as I can make her out."

"Yes, I see her now; ho, aloft! turn your night-glass upon her, and report every movement."

"Ay, ay, sir; she has changed her course, and is in full chase of us," came the answer, after a pause.

"All hands to crowd sail! Let fall every rag that will catch a breath of wind. Into the rigging every mother's son of you, for see ye not there's a craft overhauling the Sea-Slipper."

Roused by the terse, energetic voice of their captain, the crew sprung to duty; like apes they ran into the rigging, and soon had every stitch of canvas that would draw set upon the ship, which continued

each moment to increase her speed beneath the fields of white duck that crowded her straining spars.

"Now jump to the guns; double-shot all of them, and await my orders," again cried Captain Davenport, as the crew descended to the deck. So quick had been the movements of the men, so rapid the orders, that the Sea-Slipper had been crowded with sail and her men were at quarters in ten minutes after the discovery of the vessel astern.

But in vain the endeavor of the ship to keep ahead of her pursuer, for steadily and swiftly she came on, following directly in the Sea-Slipper's foaming wake with the persistency of a dog on a trail.

"This will not do—she will run over us at this rate. All hands into the rigging!" suddenly yelled the captain, and turning to his mate, he continued:

"The Sea-Slipper must be put upon her best point of sailing, Mr. Conover—directly before the wind—stand ready to obey."

A moment more and the orders rung out, clear and loud, and changing her course the gallant ship stood away before the breeze.

But all to no purpose, for the strange craft as quickly changed her course, and as silently and as rapidly as before overhauled the Sea-Slipper, until but a hundred fathoms separated the two vessels.

"That craft sails like the Flying Yankee, or—the devil!" cried Captain Davenport, and ere the words had left his lips there came a quick, stern hail:

"Ship, ahoy!"

"Ahoy the brig!" answered Captain Davenport, after a moment's hesitation, for the speed of his pursuer filled him with the greatest surprise.

"Is that the clipper ship that sailed from Mobile harbor yesterday morning?" came the query in the same clear tones.

"Ay, ay, sir; the American clipper ship Sea-Slipper, bound from Mobile to Havana—John Davenport commander," replied the commander, with seaman-like precision.

"All right! Captain Davenport, there are two British men-of-war, a ship of the line and a sloop-of-war, lying in wait for you to the southward, so I advise you to head for the eastward and shape your course as far out in the Gulf as possible. Good-night, sir."

"Thank you, sir! What brig is that?" answered the captain, but no reply came, as the commander of the brig was heard giving a few quick orders, while the vessel suddenly came closer up into the wind, shook out more sails, and rapidly glided abroad, leaving the astonished captain of the Sea-Slipper, and his still more amazed crew silent with wonder at their fleet craft being outtailed by a brig-of-war.

"Ahoy! what brig is that?" again hailed Captain Davenport; but silence followed his words, and in a few minutes more the two vessels were a long way apart, the merchantman standing a little more to the eastward, while the sea-warrior, still to windward, dashed away on a southerly course.

"Well, if my late experience at sea is not a marvel, may I never get into port! First we are overhauled by a schooner that sails like the wind, and may have, for all I know, connection with the devil; then a brig of war pursues, overtakes and passes the Sea-Slipper as though she were a lugger and not the fleetest clipper ship afloat," and with a puzzled look the captain of the merchantman paced to and fro his quarter-deck.

"You need not feel hurt, captain, because the Sea-Slipper could not keep ahead of yonder craft, for she is one of the fleetest war-vessels in the American navy," said Colonel Moncrief, who with Eve upon his arm had narrowly eyed the brig.

"I should say so; but you know her then, colonel?"

"Yes; it was the American brig-of-war *Vulture*." "Indeed! She is a gallant craft, and her officers and crew were tried men and true, from all accounts; and, now I think of it, there is a romance hanging over the *Vulture*'s career."

"Yes; but of that, captain, we will not speak more, for a painful memory to me, and to Miss Eldred here, hangs over the history of yonder vessel-of-war," said Colonel Moncrief, with deep feeling.

"Your pardon, colonel; I now recall one of your name who was an officer on board of her. Believe me I had no intention to wound."

"Well, I know that, captain; he of whom you speak was my son, but we will now let the past bury its dead," and turning quickly, Colonel Moncrief walked away, leaving the captain pained at thought that he had unintentionally wounded the feelings of two of his passengers, for whom he felt so high a regard.

An hour more passed, and nowhere over the waters was a sail visible, for the brig had disappeared in a haze that overhung the sea to windward.

Tired at length with their stay upon deck, the Sea-Slipper's passengers were about to retire to their comfortable cabin, when the look-out's voice was again heard from aloft, and from a heavy bank of fog that had drifted down from windward, came the tall masts and large hull of a line-of-battle ship.

"An Englishman, as I live! let her fall off, helmsman. There, as I breathe, is another one! Why, the Britishers are as thick in these waters as half-breeds in Mexico; but we are bowling merrily along, and if those fellows catch us it will be after a long stern chase," and the captain rubbed his hands in delight at having a few miles start of his enemies, if such they proved to be.

But of this he was not long in doubt, for, after a gun from each of the new-comers, they squared away in full stern chase.

Thus the hours passed, the clipper steadily gaining, and Captain Davenport was congratulating himself upon his escape, when an unlucky shot from the bows of the leading frigate carried away his bow-

sprit close to the deck, and another shot from the other shivered the wheel to atoms, killing the men that held it, and slightly wounding the mate.

Instantly the Sea-Slipper lost steerageway, and her bows swung round into the wind.

"By Heaven! these wounds are mortal to the good ship now; hit fore and aft at the same time."

"Here, men, remove these poor fellows, and then up and take in sail, for the Sea-Slipper has lost her heel and toe, and we are in for it," called out Captain Davenport.

Alarmed by the confusion on deck the passengers the next moment rushed from the cabin, to behold with dismay two large English frigates rushing down upon their prey.

"Ha, what have we there?" suddenly exclaimed the unfortunate captain, as there suddenly came a flash of flame, a roar, and from the course in which they had been sailing before brought to by the unlucky shots.

"The American brig! Three cheers, my men; and now, three cheers more, for yonder is her comrade, a full-fledged frigate in her wake! Now my British bulldogs, you will have to fight for your bone!" cried the captain of the Sea-Slipper, almost beside himself with joy at the turn fortune was taking in his favor.

Coming up to windward on short and rapid tacks, the brig and frigate, suddenly appearing upon the scene, were opening merrily from their guns upon the two English line-of-battle ships that had been hastening down upon their prize until warned of danger by a shot from the brig.

Instantly calling their entire crews to quarters, they reduced sail, and boldly advanced to meet their enemies, who, though much their inferior in size, were at least strong enough to give them considerable hard work to gain over them a victory.

Drifting slowly away to leeward, the Sea-Slipper was out of immediate range of the fire, and her decks were crowded with her crew and passengers, eagerly watching the sea combat, and praying for success to fall upon the two plucky American vessels who so bravely had confronted adversaries far from equal in guns and men.

Each moment the combat became more terrible, the guns flashed more rapidly and with more ominous roar; the shot shrieked exultingly through the air, the wind whistled mournfully through the rigging, and the crash of timbers, the cries of the combatants, the groans of the wounded, and dash of the waters commingled, as the contest became closer and more desperate.

In dismay, infolded in each other's arms, with Don Guido and Colonel Moncrief grasping the hand of each, Violeta and Eve stood gazing in silence upon the awful scene, sublime in its terror, while near by stood Captain Davenport, eagerly watching every move of the combatants.

"Behold! the smaller frigate is on fire!" suddenly cried Don Guido, and as he spoke, flame after flame burst up from the decks of one of the English vessels, sending a lurid glare out over the waters, while, no longer sending forth an angry roar from her guns, she lay a helpless mass upon the sea, backing and filling at the mercy of the wind, for her helmsman had deserted his post.

But, undismayed by the fate of its comrade, the other sea-warrior still continued the battle, pouring renewed fire upon the brig, which had drawn quite near her, and then above the roar of all arose another cry:

"The brig! the brig is going down!"

It was too true; the brig was indeed sinking, but yet her crew were boldly fighting her guns in her dying agony.

"Man the boats, men! We must not idly look on while there are lives to save!" cried Captain Davenport, and a few moments after five boats left the side of the Sea-Slipper, and while two rowed toward the burning frigate, three went to the aid of the brig.

The light from the burning vessel made the sea as bright as noonday, and those on board the Sea-Slipper saw several boatloads leave the unfortunate ship and row toward the other Englishman, which still fought her remaining American adversary with the strongest determination to conquer or share her companion's fate; also they saw the brig sink lower and lower, until, with a mighty plunge, she sunk beneath the waters, leaving her crew struggling in the mad vortex left by her descent into the depths below.

Anxiously all watched the return of the boats, crowded with the survivors, and then their eyes once more sought the burning frigate, which, enveloped in flames, was slowly borne away before the wind, her heated guns ever and anon pouring forth their mournful notes of woe, as they mingled with the fierce notes of the still-battling American and English frigates.

Hardly had the boats returned, bringing with them all the survivors of the brig, and those from the burning ship who had not gone aboard their consort, when, with an explosion that momentarily silenced the noise of battle, and caused the sea to fairly quake with the concussion, the gallant frigate, still wrapped in fiery splendor, was blown into atoms, and for an instant only the sudden plunge of heavy timbers, cannon, and maybe human forms, was heard, and then the silence of death reigned amid a darkness that was tangible.

Boom! boom! crash! crash! and again the battle was opened, the American frigate resuming the combat with greater earnestness, as if to avenge the loss of the brig, while, doubtless with the same motive for vengeance, the English man-of-war once more directed her guns upon her foe, and again the flashes of the broadsides illumined the sea, while those on board the Sea-Slipper gazed on with far differing feelings, for those rescued from the Englishman

hoped success would light on their flag, and those that had formed the crew and passengers of the merchantman, as well as the survivors from the brig, prayed for the stars and stripes to conquer.

Thus, one and all beheld the grand but terrible sight, and awaited with stilled hearts the issue, that would bring joy or despair to either English or Americans.

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNEXPECTED FOE.

FIERCE and fiercer grew the combat; louder and louder roared the guns; wilder and wilder resounded the cheers of the American and English crews as the contest continued, and the interested lookers-on from the decks of the Sea-Slipper feared the two frigates would bodily sink each other, ere either one would strike his colors; but no, the American vessel, smaller in size as well as weaker in guns and men, at length was observed to become unmanageable, and the next moment fell off so that her powerful adversary raked her decks from stern to bow, for her rudder had been shot away.

A few murderous discharges from the guns of the Englishman, and then, in stentorian tones, came the hail:

"Do you strike?"

"We are helpless—I surrender the ship!" answered a seamanlike voice from the American's decks, and a loud cheer broke forth from the English frigate, and was echoed by their comrades upon the Sea-Slipper. A cheer that suddenly turned into a wail—a cry, loud orders, a clash of small-arms, as suddenly out of the sulphurous smoke of combat appeared the shadowy outlines of a vessel, that with wonderful skill was brought alongside the towering hull of the victorious frigate, and more than a hundred white forms clambered upon her blood-stained decks.

Taken by surprise, unable to account for the sudden and mysterious appearance of the schooner, and believing wholly in the supernatural, the frigate's crew was driven pell-mell across the decks ere the slightest resistance was offered to their strange foes, who were headed by a tall form, armed with sword and pistols, that dealt death mercilessly around him.

"On! on! my men! Cut down every man who resists!" cried the leader, in ringing tones, and once more he sprang into the midst of the English crew, who had now begun to rally beneath the orders of their officers.

But in vain their resistance, for, unable to withstand the terrible onslaught, they were driven aft to the quarter-deck, their own guns were turned upon them, and at length the brave captain, who, a few moments before, was demanding the surrender of a conquered enemy, was compelled to haul down his ensign to a man that had vanquished him upon his own decks!

"I am Sir Edgar De Lacey, and this is his British majesty's line-of-battle-ship *Pocahontas*. To whom do I surrender my sword, sir?" said the vanquished Englishman, stepping forward, and gazing upon the crimson-masked face of his conqueror.

The victor tried to speak, his hand was outstretched, but, with a low moan, he staggered forward and would have fallen, had he not been caught in the arms of Commodore Cutting, who had that moment come on board from his ship, to see the cause of disturbance on the Englishman, whose large hull and heavy rigging had concealed the schooner from his view.

"God above! *Noel Moncrief!*" ejaculated the astonished commodore, as he tore the mask from the face of the wounded man and recognized the fainting form in his arms. At the request of the English officer he bore Noel into the spacious cabin and laid him upon a lounge, when the surgeon was summoned to attend him, for he was wounded severely in the side.

The next moment Lieutenant Muriel dashed into the cabin, exclaiming:

"What! Captain Noel dead?"

"No, he is severely wounded; are you his lieutenant?" answered Sir Edgar De Lacey.

"I am, sir; you will surrender your sword to me, if you please," haughtily but politely returned the young Spaniard, as he removed from his face its silken covering.

"May I ask the name of your schooner and the commander that has taken a ship of the line?"

"Certainly, sir; it is the craft known as the Flying Yankee, and this gentleman lying here is Captain Noel, her commander."

Without a word the English officer surrendered his sword, which Muriel, taking, immediately returned to its owner with a light compliment; and then, turning to Commodore Cutting, who stood near, said:

"I believe you are the commanding officer of the squadron that engaged this vessel?"

"I am Commodore Cutting, sir, and the frigate alongside is my flag-ship."

"You will then be kind enough to take command of this prize, and with your permission I will now remove Captain Noel on board his own vessel, and depart."

"Not so fast, young man, for this gentleman is too seriously wounded to be moved, and besides he shall no longer dodge the reward of his numerous gallant services to his government, now that it is known that Noel Moncrief and the commander of the famous Flying Yankee are one and the same."

"Yes, Commodore Cutting, I am Noel Moncrief, the Ocean Rover," suddenly broke in the stern voice of the wounded man, and turning quickly at the words, all beheld that he had recovered from his unconsciousness and was gazing the American commander firmly in the face.

"My noble boy! Gladly do I welcome you back into the service of your country—"

"Hold! Commodore Cutting! Have you forgotten I fled my land, Cain-accursed—"

"My God! have you not heard that your brother recovered, and—"

"Great God, I thank Thee! I am not then a very Cain," and Noel buried his head in the silken cushions of his couch.

"No, Noel; Clarence recovered wholly from his wound, and, chastened by his afflictions, he banished himself from the world and became a priest of the church of Rome, while your father and his ward are now near by, for they sailed from Mobile in the Sea-Slipper, which was the cause of our desperate combat with our brave foe here."

"God, again I thank thee!" once more murmured the happy man, who so long had been a wanderer, Cain-accursed, as he believed.

Beckoning to the English commander and Hernando Muriel to follow him, Commodore Cutting ascended to the deck and gave orders for the disposition of the English crews and care of the wounded; after which he made known to Sir Edgar and the young Spaniard the strange story of Noel Moncrief's life, a story which the young lieutenant of the Flying Yankee heard for the first time, for of his past Noel had never spoken.

"His life indeed has been a strange romance, and of startling interest, and I now wonder not at his earnest desire to remain *incognito*, though serving America with wonderful skill and energy," remarked the English nobleman, who, then turning suddenly toward Muriel, continued: "Lieutenant, the career of your vessel has been overhanging with mystery, and if not asking too much I would beg you to answer several puzzling questions."

"Ay, ay, young sir; explain, may it please you, how it was you made even educated minds believe in a supernatural agency ruling the destiny of your beautiful craft," said Commodore Cutting, with interest, gazing into the manly face of the young officer.

"Assuredly, gentlemen, I will explain, for mystery with us now is at an end."

"The craft lying there, and known as the Flying Yankee, was once the schooner Red Wing—"

"Ha! the resemblance between the two is now disclosed," exclaimed Commodore Cutting.

"Yes, sir; the Red Wing of the Mexican service formerly and the Flying Yankee are the same schooner, which, when Captain Noel—Moncrief, I believe, is his true name—resigned from the service of the Mexicans, he metamorphosed into the present weird-looking craft, which he at once ran under his private colors, and made war upon England."

"A terrible foe he proved, too, and one whose deeds would win him an admiral's commission on our side of the water; but the mystery of his being able to carry his poles enveloped in canvas sufficient to run under a ship of the line—explain that, please, lieutenant," and the Englishman seemed deeply interested.

"That is easy of explanation, sir, and I will give you ocular demonstration of the circumstance, as it now is nearly sunrise. Ho! the Flying Yankee!" and the clear voice of the young officer rung out sharp in the crisp morning.

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the voice of Mr. Hart from the schooner, which was lying-to, a cable's length from the frigate.

"Get out your mask sails on the schooner."

"Ay, ay, sir!" came the response, and almost immediately a perfect network of sails was put upon the beautiful vessel, so closely woven as at a short distance to resemble real canvas, and cause one to believe the schooner was really spread with white duck.

"I see, I see! Remarkable indeed, Lieutenant, your commander is a wonderful man."

"So we all think, Sir Edgar," modestly replied Muriel, while the American commodore put in:

"But the smoke and spectral light that always hung about your craft when seen either by night or day, sir?"

"Easily explained, commodore. We were in the habit of burning bright lights that cast a reflection through colored glass, and the smoke we manufactured by burning wool that had been dampened and placed in iron vessels on various parts of the decks. These tricks, added to our network sails, the wonderful speed of the schooner, our men clothed in white, and with their faces hidden beneath crimson masks, rendered us, doubtless, a most spectral and scare-to-death craft and crew," and the young Spaniard laughed lightly.

"Indeed it did, and I for one am glad to know the secret, and treble glad to welcome back to the navy Noel Moncrief, who shall command his schooner, if he recover, and God grant he may, with his brave men, and no longer be an ocean rover, but an honored officer of the United States navy. But time flies, and there is much for us to do, so, Sir Edgar, you will oblige me by retaining command of your vessel, temporarily repairing damages, and following me back to Mobile, to which port the Flying Yankee, under command of her gallant lieutenant here, must lead the way."

A few hours more, the four vessels, with the Flying Yankee leading, the Sea-Slipper in her wake, and the two frigates following, got under weigh and the day after dropped anchor off the city of Mobile. Shortly after the anchors had been let fall, Noel Moncrief was conveyed on board the Flying Yankee at his urgent request, for he was not as seriously wounded as all had at first supposed, and reclining upon silken cushions in his luxurious cabin, attended by the faithful lieutenant and his warm friend, Westley North, the boatswain, the young commander was awaiting the coming of visitors, for

Commodore Cutting had sent him word that he would come to see him, bringing with him those whom the wounded officer would dearly love to see.

"The commodore's barge is approaching, sir, and I recognize in the stern-sheets Captain Ainslie and Lieutenant Bernard," said West, as he gazed from the stern port.

"Thank God they escaped from the brig!" murmured Noel.

"Yes, sir, they were rescued by the boats of the clipper ship; but here they come," announced the faithful boatswain.

Need I dwell upon the meeting between father and son—the meeting between Noel and Eve Eldred—the warm greeting of the wounded hero from Commodore Cutting, Alden Ainslie and Calvin Bernard—the surprised and delighted welcome of Don Guido and the lovely Violeta?

No, kind reader, let me draw a veil over that scene of joy, and hasten on to a denouement of strange and startling interest, that took place there in that cabin, when Don Guido and Lieutenant Muriel met face to face. Years ago they had well known each other; ay, more—Don Muriel, the father of the young lieutenant, had fallen in a *duello* with, and by the hand of, Don Octavio; and yet, when their children grew to man's and woman's estate, Hernando and Violeta dared to love each other, and for such crime, as the son of Don Octavio and brother of Violeta called it, Muriel was challenged by the young Octavio, who determined to make him answer with his life for daring to love his sister.

Muriel possessed a noble nature, and knowing that his father had been wrong in the duel that had cost him his life, he was willing to forgive and forget, especially when the beautiful Violeta was the object of his idolatry, and he fain would have spared her brother.

But, unlike his father, a reckless, dissipated man, governed wholly by his evil passions, the young Octavio determined to be satisfied only with the life of his supposed enemy, and had dared him to meet him.

They met: Muriel slew the brother of Violeta, and, realizing fully his banishment from her presence, he fled from his native land, to become leagued with a band of buccaners, until the offer of Noel Moncrief made him an officer, fighting beneath the Mexican flag.

Remembering well the circumstances that caused Muriel to fly from his native land, both Don Octavio Guido and Violeta were yet of a most forgiving nature; they readily forgot the past, thought only of the noble qualities of the young man, and received him once more into their affections.

Through the instrumentality of Commodore Cutting, a pardon was readily obtained for Noel, for the crime of slaying his superior officer, and also for Westley North, in consideration of the valuable services he had rendered to the government and country of the United States.

Having recovered from his wound, Noel once again assumed command, with the rank of captain of the Flying Yankee, which, with her old officers and crew upon her decks, spread her white wings and flew away in search of new dangers, until the close of hostilities between the United States and England caused her sharp prow to be turned homeward, where Noel Moncrief and Muriel Mendez, the real name of the young Spaniard, found a warm welcome awaiting them, from Eve and Violeta, whom shortly after, they led to the altar, to be irrevocably bound together in the holy bonds of matrimony.

As for the Flying Yankee, she became a pleasure yacht. Noel having converted her to such, appointing Westley North her commander, and her severest duties consisted in carrying the young officer, with his beautiful wife and Colonel Moncrief, to Cuba, to pass a part of the cold winters at the magnificent plantation home of Don Muriel Mendez and Violeta, while, at the commencement of the warm summer days, the fleet craft would have as passengers, northward bound, her former lieutenant, his Cuban bride, and Don Octavio.

Then in the old baronial halls of Moncrief Manor were wont to gather merry parties, among whom, outside the family circle, were recognizable Commodore Cutting, Alden Ainslie, and Calvin Bernard, all of whom rejoiced in the happiness of their old shipmate.

One other was there also, who was wont, once a year, to visit Moncrief Mansion and pass a few days—a mild-faced man, upon whom the seal of sorrow had fallen with heavy hand, chastening and subduing the fiery heart within.

That man was Clarence Moncrief, wearing the robes of a Catholic priest, who, having banished himself from the world, and forgiven his brother with true Christian spirit, had devoted himself to a life of toil and privation, his greatest joy being his yearly visit to the home of his boyhood, where he was wont to pass the greater part of his time in rambling amid the forest trees, with the children of Noel and Eve his constant companions.

THE END.

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